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THIS REALM, THIS ENGLAND

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE AIRY WAY.

THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH.

THE LEANING SPIRE.

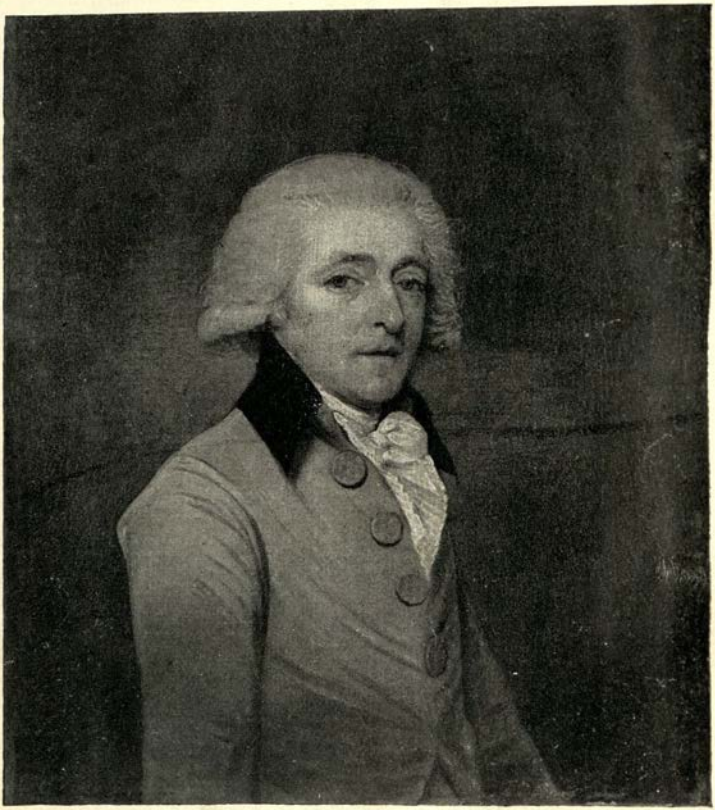
THE FAERY YEAR.

MINIATURES.

WILD BIRDS THROUGH THE YEAR.

THE BIRDS IN OUR WOOD.

THE BOOK OF THE DRY FLY.



THE OLD ENGLISH SQUIRE.

THIS REALM, THIS ENGLAND

BY GEORGE A. B. DEWAR

AUTHOR OF

"THE AIRY WAY," "THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH,"

"THE LEANING SPIRE," ETC.

Rx-d-61

LONDON

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1913

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TO

LORD CURZON OF KEDLESTON

"Chatham's language was his mother tongue,
And Wolfe's great name compatriot with his own."

". . . this little world ;
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
* * * * *
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

SHAKESPEARE.

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NOTE.—I thank the Editor of the "Morning Post."—G. A. B. D

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(From a picture owned by A. W. Dewar, Esq., of Doles, Hampshire.)

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PHASE ONE

ENGLISH SOIL

CHAPTER I

CLIFFS OF ALBION

I THOUGHT the noblest view in England opened out in a flash to me one day, having walked from Totland Bay across Headon Hill, and turned south and seaward at the road that leads right up to the cliff at Alum. It was late summer, and at that spot a sheet of purple heather on the slope and sheltered side of the hill went out to meet the sheet of azure above and the deeper blue of the sea far below.

I want such a day clear and bright, and such a union of colour to make that claim for the scene at Alum; but, given them, I think it not a wild or reckless claim. I have never seen a finer bit of land and sky and seascape well compressed together, and the whole animate with the sense of national life and power, than the scene at Alum presents.

There is only one thing wanting at such a time at Alum—a good view of the great white or grey escarpment of the rock which has given England another name. To get that view you must cross to the mainland opposite, anywhere between Milford village or the Haven at Poole, and look over the

water to Alum or to Scratchels Bay and the Needles. Then you shall see Albion: and the Gaul, or whoever made that name, was a very true judge of the natural features of a country, for the great white-fronted cliff is easily the master feature of the English coast scene.

You see it again near Portland and in that huge bit of escarpment between the Old Harry Rocks and Swanage, where the shining white herring gulls nest in May with a jet-black raven or two among them; and then turning east you have it in a very splendid form at Dover and by Eastbourne. To understand the truth of the name Albion it is a good way to steam in a fast man-of-war or a cruiser right down the coast from the Thames or the Medway to Portland or to the end of the Dorsetshire cliffs and the end of the chalk. I have done that, and been divided in homage between the splendid ritual of the daily life and round on a ship of war and the pageant of our English sea; divided and yet faithful to both, for there are times when they do appear to be welded naturally into one another, to be one dominion.

Another way is to come in across the Channel in a good light and watch the Seven Sisters and Beachy Head come clear and clearer out of the distance till the whole of their lovely curve and scallop are cut out with perfect precision on the skyline.

Shakespeare, I think, must have had that experience more than once in his life, and felt it through and through his glorious being. Only a man who was an intimate of these compelling scenes of the coast could have got them into words as he did in two or three of his plays.

He knew at least and revelled in the figuring and vast bulwark of that cliff at Dover that bears his name. He must have watched it at sea growing and growing in distinction and substance out of the distance—

> "That pale-faced shore
> Whose foot spurns back the ocean's roaring tides,
> . . . *that* England hedged in with the main."

Equally he must have been drawn and held by the immense magnetic power which these cliffs often exercise over those who view them from immediately below or look down from their summits. He exaggerated the height of the precipice:

> "Look up a-height; the shrill-gorged lark so far
> Cannot be seen or heard——"

One *must* exaggerate the height and mass of "this chalky bourn" when the full spell of the cliff is felt at such near quarters. The thing is common to all imaginations that are ruled at all by the power of the cliff at the sea. In the scene at "the cliff without a name" in Mr. Hardy's story, "A Pair of Blue Eyes," one is impressed by an idea of Himalayan height and

bulk, though has not the author conscientiously told us in a later preface to the book that the actual height is but seven hundred feet, almost a small affair against something at Chamonix or the Matterhorn?

* * * * *

The charm of the chalk is in some degree the charm of insularity among many of us. Right or wrong, one hugs the idea that it is above all other rocks the special rock of England, geologically our rock. It is something of a surprise to find a pale-faced shore across the water as well as at home. Travelling by train through Normandy anyone who knows the English chalk scenery well—its streams and hills, and the configuration of the land—but does not know France well, may wonder still more to find some of the familiar features there too.

Where the chalk is really the soil or undersoil, even though it does not actually break through the green in places or take the form of rolling down and grey greensward, I think it cannot be overlooked or mistaken. In Normandy you can tell you are on the chalk in places, though you may not see a sign of down. There is something in its form as well as in its flora, and, where water flows, there is something still more in its streams and meadows that announces chalk quite clearly.

So that as a man who knows the chalk character well travels through Normandy he is often finding himself back in England at this spot and that, in

spite of French blinds and French poplars. There is no doubt about the chalk abroad—wherever it carries a stream or curves into the suggestion of a down or shows a few sprays of vitalba, the "traveller's joy"—being a bit of England.

Chalk is Albion. Not another rock or soil in England strikes one in the same way. Who, coming upon Bagshot sands or Cornish serpentine or upon good red sandstone of Devon in a foreign country, feels, in the same degree he feels when on a chalk down, that he is back in England? I suppose an Aberdonian hardly has the illusion that his foot is on his native heath when he alights abroad upon the very stuff, grand stuff, which Grampian or Cairngorm is made of.

The chalk, I insist, is even more Albion, more English, than the granite is Aberdeen and Deeside.

* * * * *

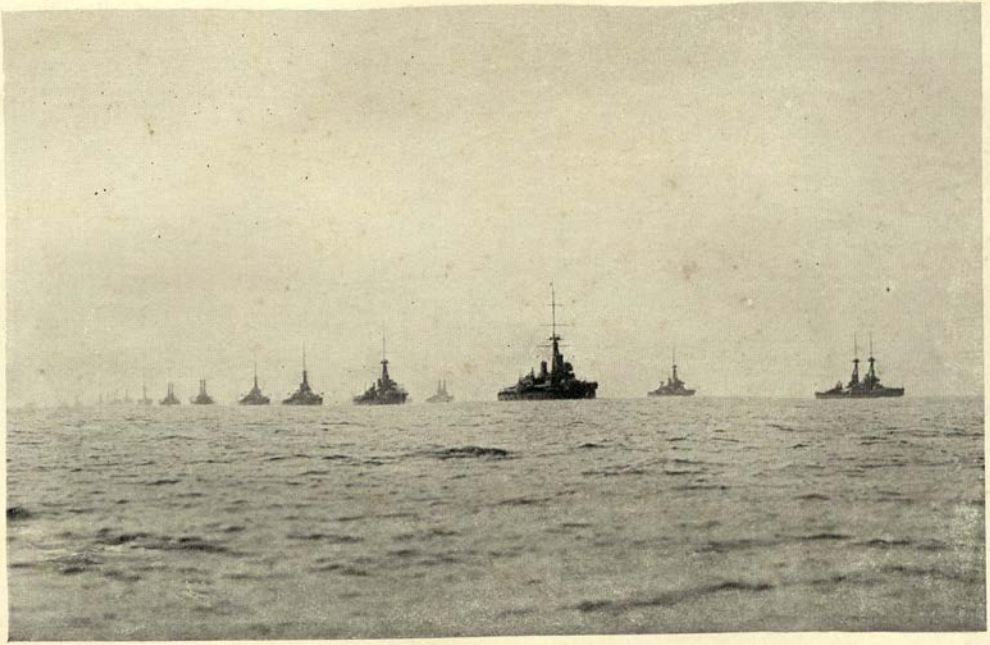
The charm of the chalk cliffs of England has nothing to do with rarity and choiceness of colouring. The last thing on earth to claim for chalk is prettiness. It has no curious veining. It has nothing crystalline. It has nothing of colour. From its rock no paper-knife or letter-weight can be contrived; there cannot be knicknacks or—except perhaps for fossils—curios of chalk, which defects account a virtue in chalk. It is true you can have "A Present from Alum"; I do not know whether they still make and find buyers for the little glass lighthouse so labelled in my childhood in any Isle of Wight toy-shop at

Ryde or Newport; but anyhow the present has, or had, nothing to do with chalk from the sea cliff of England—it was an arrangement in pretty little layers of the gay-tinted sands of Alum.

The chalk wall, in fact, is essentially an *ugly* rock as we see it at near quarters round the English coast. I do not mean, of course, that it is an ugly object as we view it from the sea, and as it comes out of distance. I have looked a hundred times at the cliff at Alum and at Scratchels Bay from the mainland, and seen it appearing and disappearing in the sea films through October and November and December days, and I know well that the effect is often most strange and magical; and I know that viewed thus the chalk cliff can be a thing of utmost beauty. But view it close by and in a harder and brighter light, and one must admit that a great sea wall of chalk can be an ugly, sullen-looking object. Alum illustrates this as well as any cliff I know. It has been so stained and fouled by weather that "white" ill expresses it. Alum cliff, when we fairly come into the bay and view it from the strand below, has nothing of beauty.

* * * * *

The appeal to us of these weather-stained walls of chalk is doubtless an appeal of Nature. The magnetic-like, almost the mesmeric-like, power which the huge, sheer mass has on us at close quarters is wholly the force of Nature. But there is quite another appeal in Shakespeare's pale-faced shore as we view it out at



"ENGLAND, MY ENGLAND."

sea : these cliffs have an appeal of Nation as well as an appeal of Nature. Shakespeare writing those lines on his cliff was writing national and patriotic poetry hardly less than Campbell in his sea songs or Cowper in "Toll for the brave."

If the downs and streams and meadows of the chalk express particularly the Nature of Albion, the rock at Alum or at Shakespeare's Cliff expresses particularly the Nation of Albion.

The rock at Alum is to me quite inseparate from the idea of nation and sea power and rule. Portsmouth Harbour is hard by, Spithead is hard by, and the whole scene is one constant expression of nationhood and sea power. Take away this emotion and half the appeal of the chalk cliffs viewed from the sea is lost. I do not see how the chalk of Albion can have much of a charm for the cosmopolite. The appeal of Shakespeare's Cliff to Shakespeare was an appeal largely of nation. What a case it was among all those great, fresh Elizabethans of "This England . . . set in the silver sea"!

CHAPTER II

DOWNS OF ALBION

THERE may be countries besides Albion with the great white escarpment, the "pale-faced shore." Shakespeare's Cliffs may belong to France as well as to England. There may be other countries with those lovely clear chalk-streams which we often pride ourselves we only have. I have seen something, I must say, across the water very like the distinctive stream of the chalk districts of England. The cliff and the stream, however, are one thing, the down is quite another, and I take my stand there. Never having seen anything like a true English chalk down abroad, I cannot imagine there is one out of England. France is a splendid country, the land and the people, but I cannot conceive of its having great stretches of our chalk down scenery. The idea of Lambourne Downs or of a Salisbury Plain out of England is too much for belief.

The long, glorious sweep of the down as I know it in England, the grand extent in grey and green of it, the leagues of its original short, crisp turf studded with a flora that sometimes rivals in all but colour the miniature flora of the Alps—these things we must have to ourselves.

Chalk, as I have said, wherever it comes near the surface, is unmistakable to those who have lived on it or know its character at all well. Its trees declare it; much of its smaller flora as well as its fauna declare it. The whole lie of the land, the configuration of hill and vale, do so. But there can be those distinguishing marks over miles and miles of a soil or under-soil of chalk without the chief feature of all—the ungoverned chalk down. Until we reach a point in the chalk country where the ploughed fields and rich pastures and more or less planted woods give place to grey down we are scarcely on the true thing; at least we do not realize the simplest, noblest, and far the most characteristic expression of chalk.

The chalk stream often flows over gravel beds so yellow or gold they paint the trout that lie on them; or often it flows through a peaty or loamy soil. The chalk-faced sea cliff often alternates with sands and other substances that are its accidental neighbours utterly unrelated to it—thus, Alum sands, close alongside Alum chalk. But once we reach fairly on to the downs inland, on to those, for example, of King Alfred's country about the Blowing Stone and the White Horse with its huge manger, we reach the thing in its grand, simple, elemental form.

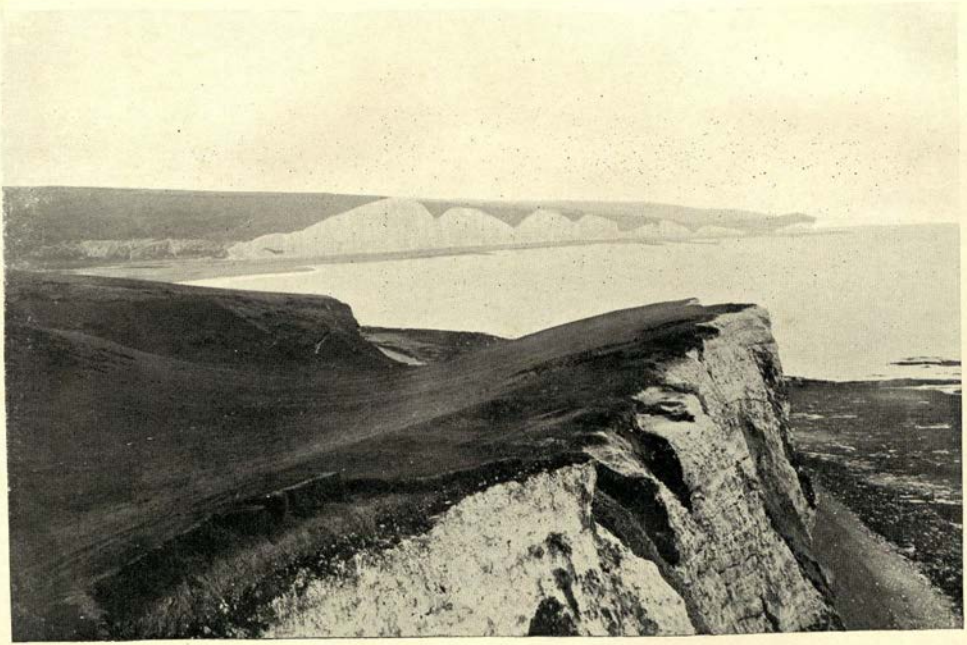
Albion to me—and I think that many who like and have lived upon chalk will agree to this—is nowhere more undisputed Albion than inland and lifted

clear of the highest wheatfield and of even the highest sainfoin.

* * * * *

The appeal of the chalk down, like that of the chalk cliff, is one of Nation as well as one of Nature. In it again is Albion absolute. Only there is this difference in the appeal—away from the coast line and coast height it is not related to the emotion of Imperialism or patriotism. The great, white-fronted cliff suggests all the old might and sea pride of Albion. It bespeaks defiance—I risk being called a Jingo; indeed, I believe I am something of the Jingo; but anyhow, I here choose defiance in preference to defence. The great stretch of chalk downs inland, most of them out of sight and thought of the sea, have an appeal homely rather than majestic, though this, too, is often an appeal to the spirit of nation—"This is England *out and out*, and there is no country quite to match it!"

The charm of the chalk downs from the natural point of view, their charm in landscape, consists largely, I think, in their long, gentle roll and easy curve. Broken ground is what we often desire and admire in landscape. Abrupt breaks in the land, hill, and hollow, and rocks and strata of all forms and tilts, flung carelessly together, are the making of many of the most effective English landscapes. But where chalk heaves up to the surface and curves into these noble grey-green downs the last thing we shall find is anything abrupt or broken into diverse forms. The



SHAKESPEARE'S PALE-FACED COAST.

only abrupt break in these tracts of chalk is at certain spots where the turf suddenly ends and with it the down itself suddenly ends; it is as if it had been split and broken clean off, the whole of one huge side to the down, and had tumbled into the valley below, leaving exposed a sheer wall of white rock. That is the inland cliff of the chalk country, exactly like Shakespeare's Cliffs at the shore, only rarely, if ever, so high. I can think of one at this moment which has always struck me as a most solemn and splendid thing to see—the rude escarpment of the great chalk downs that are rolled and massed above the Kingsclere district.

Many of these chalk downs, even some of the highest of them—as the one which overlooks that Kingsclere panorama and the valleys of the Kennet and Thames—are beech-crowned; whilst hazel woods climb far up others, and the yew-trees flourish there on some of the most windy slopes. These clumps are inspiring landmarks certainly; it is good on a clear day to stand at some high spot and pick out Faringdon Clumps or Cottington Clumps, forty or fifty miles away. But, on the whole, the best scenes of the chalk downs are the absolutely bare ones. Where the downs are high, rising from seven hundred to nine hundred feet above the sea level—in one spot they rise to a thousand feet—and ranged in great masses, I want no vegetation to soften their outline against the sky. The contour of the chalk down

is one of the most beautiful things in English landscape. The outline is so fine and true on the horizon; the roll and heave of the range have a curve and sweep I cannot tire of looking at, near by or from the distance.

An old English house, set right among the downs, has a wonderful site. There are some houses in this setting, but not many, because these best places in the downs are the wildest, and they are very greatly exposed to storms and are not at all hospitable. There is one I have never seen, though I know parts of the range well enough, and I know its position. You go out on to the lawn, and at the end of the lawn, right in front of you, is the great calming slope of grey-green. Wordsworth, who understood in an extraordinary degree what intimacy with Nature meant, knew the worth of such surroundings. He could find neighbours and friends in inanimate things, and a certain wonderful sympathy in Nature, as his lines on the death of Fox show:

> "Loud is the vale, the voice is up
> With which she speaks when storms are past."

What a noble neighbour a great chalk down, unploughed and unplanted, must be just outside our door and window, unchanging through life, except that the turf grows a shade greener in summer, and a shade greyer in winter!

* * * * *

The chalk downs are Albion absolute, but not so

their human history—that seems to have started and ended ages before the name had been thought of, ages before England had dimly begun. They have probably had no history worth speaking of since the start of England; only the history of shepherd and sheep. But these downs had a great remote drama. No man who walks across a range or two of the chalk can doubt it for a moment. The proof of the thing is perfectly clear to see, first in the camps and next in the barrows—where the men of the Bronze Age buried their leaders—that are scattered about many of the high, bare spots, and have here and there given a name to some village in the coombe or valley beneath. There is "the field of the seven barrows," and there is "the field of the dead" among these grey downs, and to this day, when the barrows are opened, the ashes of the heroes, and sometimes the very hair, untouched by time, are found within.

The plough has never passed over the barrows on the highest downs; their outline and size must be very much what they were when piled in the age of bronze. In some places the barrows are the only objects that for mile upon mile of close turf break the gentle curve and smooth undulation of the downs; but they have become so grown into the downs, both the round barrows and the long, that they appear to be part of the natural scene. The barrow looks as though it was in the geology and evolution of the downs.

The supreme minutes in the scene of the bare downs are when the sun, as a globe of intense orange-red fire, with its photosphere clear of the least wisp of cloud, drops on to the edge of the down darkly etched on the horizon. Perceptibly and quickly it sinks out of sight. The sun, till it actually touches the rim of the earth, appears stationary, but the instant it is there it is seen as a moving thing; and it moves so quickly that we can understand then the excellence of that old commonplace figure named the flight of time. We see the flight. They are minutes —a very few of them, but packed with Nature sensation!—of precise, of extreme definition. For definition in these chalk downs I must wait for the dusk, whether on a November day or on a June day. I realize then to the full the fineness of the long, clean, unshowy line; and when the sun is sunk below that line I can realize too the huge swart bulk and materialism of the downs.

CHAPTER III

"THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH—"

I

I WALKED up the long, straight "ride" and came out at the end of the wood, to stand for a while in the large unfenced sainfoin field and look on twenty miles of harvest just begun. I go there when I want some feeling of the great open spaces. I think I have generally got some good out of the scene when I have been cramped and low and dispirited. This ride towards the close of summer is a tunnel through brake-fern and hazel underwood and oak-trees. It is always so overgrown at this time of year that there can be no riding along it with comfort till the boughs are trimmed for the fox-hunt, and even in walking one has often to put aside the ends and trailers of underwood and to brush through thick, tall brake-ferns which, by August, are beginning to give at the point where their clean, straight stems leave the ground.

That bending and breaking of the fern stem, weeks before the fronds turn yellow, months sometimes before they are brown—what a warning sign it is of the end now in sight, in *feel!* Wet and wind in

August no doubt may force down the bracken before its proper time; yet, whatever the weather, I always find at this time some of the tallest stems giving thus at the point where they leave the ground; and not even reddening or yellowing leaves warn me clearer than they do that the summer is mainly spent.

The bracken was almost or quite the latest thing in this gleaming woodland tunnel to perfect its green; it is the earliest thing to falter out of the pageant. It cannot carry upright its own weight, when the run of the sap has ended and the summer turned. Many things in Nature seem to stay a little at perfection—though we know that really nothing can—but the bracken in these deep, woody places does not even seem to stay.

The view from the rough sainfoin at the top of the ride is not one of distinguished landscape. Some people may find it prosaic English. I find it homely English. It has no signal height, no very striking feature in form, though about it is none of the monotony of some rich champaign of the flat Midlands. It is twenty miles of ample, easy sweep of hill and hollow; nothing abrupt or very wild about its medley of corn and pasture, of downs, oak woods, and parklands, with here and there a thread of clear water, yet nothing in its effect as a whole I think that can fairly be called tame.

With the dulled green of late summer largely suppressed in the landscape, its ruling colours are the

faint purple of the woods and distance, and the brown and pale yellow of the three chief corn crops cut and standing.

Prosaic scenery or not, it is absolute English. I doubt from what I have seen and heard whether one could find anything truly like it abroad. I certainly have not found its match in Italy, France, Norway. We have plenty of scenery, hill and plain, which can be matched by Continental landscape, but here, as in the scene from Alum, the great thing is the blend of national and natural features that keeps the scene so very English; the large and moderate sized farms, the large and the less estates, and the two or three great parks and old domains form a whole peculiar to our life and character.

It is quite a good microcosm of the English social system in the countryside; the villages of two to five hundred souls, the hamlets of twenty or so upwards, the small town with its market and railway, the squires, the one or two "territorialists" as Lord Morley styles the largest type of landowner, the tenant-farmers renting anything from fifty to two thousand acres—three to four hundred may be the average farm—and then the mass of the small trading and working people who thrive or sicken according to whether or not the class above them is stable or fluctuating.

* * * * *

Of all prejudices to-day about English life and

Society surely the most absurd is that which belittles old family and old tenure. To scorn old family and the holding through generations of a piece of land, large or small, by the same family, poor or rich, is about as wise as to make light of the Japanese for worshipping their ancestors. The ignorance of the thing is comic and it is colossal.

If there is one thing in our whole system of society that is clearly not "snobbish" it is the feeling of respect for old names and old families on the soil.

It would be senseless to regard old books or old pictures or old buildings as snobbish, or to argue that there is no virtue in their being old, but perhaps not quite so senseless as this other prejudice. The mob who in revolution want to smash the pictures and buildings have the same kind of intelligence and imagination as those who in peace want to smash the tradition of old family.

This twenty miles of English harvest which one looks over from the high field of sainfoin depends very largely for the welfare of its people on whether the social system is lasting and steady—a thing that is only secured by the families being secured. If the holders of the great estates and the holders of the lesser estates are constantly shifted, the whole body of people suffer—there is nothing surer in the problem of the land. Lately I ran through a list of most of the chief land-owning families in this bit of England which the view from the high point embraces. I ran through

it with one who knows it still better than I do; and I think we could not fix on more than about three considerable families which have been secured on this stretch of land for over fifty years.

Within the last fifteen years or so nearly all the old families of note have been forced to sell and go, and now their successors in many a case are selling and going. Only the largest—and the oldest—have been able to hold on.

Leaving the sainfoin field, one takes a path that leads to a spot a mile away, which commands quite a different view. It overlooks a stretch of wider and more hilly country—another twenty miles of fair English harvest! I doubt if there are more than two of its old families left. It is not Goldsmith's story by any means, for men decay, but wealth does not accumulate. True, wealth often comes in with the new name, but it has a habit of not staying; it is a shy visitor. Why should it stay? It soon discovers that the deepest rooted on the soil may be the easiest to despoil.

"A man who buys land to-day in England is a fool"—when "Domesday" is complete and the volume ready for the State binder, this bitter familiar saying to-day of the countryside might make an apt quotation for one of its preliminary pages.

The old order of the land changes then, but it does not seem to be giving place to anything that can be called a new order. The new family is often gone

almost as soon as come. Very likely it came because it knew nothing about the land, and is gone because it learnt something more than it had reckoned for.

Instead of the understanding of the land and its duties—handed down from generation to generation —we have flux and a loss of that old sense of responsibility that knits together a society.

There is the net result so far of the passing of the old order from the land. I believe in change and strife or struggle as supremely necessary to all progress: one must, unless one turns into a soft or sentimentalist. The thing is always going on everywhere in Nature. But as Nature breaks down she builds up. Our twentieth-century Solons seem to overlook that truth.

II

Scott spoilt "St. Ronan's Well," it is said, by changing the plot to suit the morals of his publishers or his public. I have never quite known what was the original version, so the criticism does not appeal to me. But whatever else Scott spoilt for the sake of decorum, he certainly did not spoil those last few pages which set forth the later phases in the laird's career. It is about the most convincing thing in "St. Ronan's Well" or in the whole of the mighty Scott's work—one *is* convinced—convinced of its absolute truth and naturalness. Scott did not contrive any artificial ending for the career of Mowbray, making him

live happily ever after, or wretchedly ever after. Scott let the laird dree his own weird.

It would have been much easier—and not in the least convincing—to bring old Touchwood's entire fortune to the service of St. Ronan's straight away. But Scott knew better. He left it to Nature, and he left it to the laird, and between them they pulled round the estate, with Meiklewham as their middleman.

I by no means take the laird of St. Ronan's Well as a favourable example of the old order on the land. Far from it; he was, I should say, quite an exception on most sides of his character. But the later phase in his career does serve to point a capital moral: it well shows what a man who has been careless, even reckless, in his calling can do to work out his own salvation if not discouraged or actually forbidden by outside, by essentially artificial, interruption.

St. Ronan's, a bad representative of the old order, quite one whom we should call "a waster" at the start, pulled his own round after the smash. The novelist, knowing real life well, allowed him to do so, and the result is felt by the reader to be true and excellent. Now this is quite the lesson which the statesman wise in fact as Scott was in fiction would always bear in mind in his plans to fortify or to replace the old order as a whole on the land. As it is, the one ruling wish of the theorists—and terrorists—of to-day in England really seems to be to prevent anything like a natural restoring and reforming. Nothing

is to be allowed to grow up naturally ; the first and pressing business in all things to do with the old order on the land is to pull down artificially.

To those who have lived in actual touch with it, and thought without passion of its problems, the land in an old country like England seems the last subject fit for the theorists and artificers of Society, the Siéyès sort, to play with ; and yet the land is the foremost thing they persist in playing with.

Whether he happens to be a good and unfortunate laird, or whether—like the character in Scott—a bad and unfortunate laird, St. Ronan's to-day is to have no chance whatever of rescuing himself. He is to go, and he is not even to be allowed to go naturally. He is to be forced out artificially. The place is to be put into Chancery, and henceforth whatever St. Ronans yields Chancery will apply to the upkeep, not of the countryside, but of the badge and livery of its brand new order of officers.

Now, suppose Scott had ended his story in that fashion. How we should have yawned over its last pages ! How well we could all have agreed that "St. Ronan's Well" marked the close of Scott's great fund of common sense and Scott's gift of informed imagination !

* * * * *

I wrote of the panorama of the harvest, some twenty miles of that splendid English scene, as it appears from the sainfoin field or from the hanger overlooking the

downlands. Living or staying near such a spot, we are drawn to it day after day to see what is happening to the crops. To be interested in the scene, we need not be directly concerned in it as owner, farmer, or worker. The immense stake of the thing must appeal to us, and the obvious truth that so many thousand pounds' worth of food is here spread out to save or spoil, according to whether sun or cloud prevails in the next week or two.

Not to be moved by the harvest when we survey it thus in great bulk, at an anxious season when rain may spoil all, would argue a strangely incurious mind. Wheat is a form of gold. Realize this, and it is impossible not to be interested in the sight and in the question whether it is to be gathered or in large degree lost before the month is out.

The wheat scene has, or should have, a clear, direct bearing on this question of the old order on the land throughout England and its future. We need only glance at the market price of corn to-day to understand this. It shows that once again wheat in England can be grown at a good or a fair profit. The harvest scene from the steep beech and oak hanger goes to prove this, quite apart from the figures given in every local print. Right among the dark green of a mass of rough woodland, on the slope and in the hollow of one of the downs, lies a large patch of brown and yellow. That distant patch is crops of corn—oats and barley perhaps, mixed with wheat.

Many years ago—I cannot well recall the day myself—there was the same yellow and brown amid the dark green or blue of those woods; it was when the old order on the land was still largely undisturbed. Then come a stretch of years, something like thirty, when the colour of corn died out of that down: the land had gone to waste, for corn could not be grown on it to profit. Now once more appears the grand gold of the best crop in the world—for wheat, when all has been said, *is* that.

The English land system, wisely modified, has the chance to steady itself anew—this is what the value of corn to-day tells us, and the colour of it beginning to reappear in places which for so many years were given over to rough and rabbit. Land system does not mean the man who owns the cornfield, or the man who rents it, or the man who reaps it. Land system means the three together—and much more than the three, for it means all the trading and professional people throughout the countryside. There is no segregating their lives and interests.

That is the very simple truth about a society like that of the land in England, which backward or impatient minds somehow cannot grasp. The man who thinks he could destroy one of the classes from this society without injury to the whole is as a man who thinks he can remove a spring from his watch and yet not hurt it as a timepiece. Really, I think I would prefer the full-fledged Socialist for my watch-

maker. He at least is more amusing. He would take not a spring out of the timepiece to make it go better, but would take the whole mechanism to bits and remake it while you wait—the chief objection to his plan being the truth that he has never made anything save a theory. But it is not from such minds that we can look for help or hope about the land. Take a look at the great harvest scene from the beech and oak hanger to-day—how utterly it confounds the land theorist and the land tinker!

I thought, looking on the old familiar scene, which is yet so new again, that I had never seen anything finer in a year of English landscape. There is no deceiving oneself—August is quite the last act of summer. The elms are black-green in coombes below, and here on the hanger all the wild grasses are seeded and spent. The burnet moths burr heavily among them, settling now and then on the knapweed, the bronze and purple being about the only bits of high colour left from the pageant. But the scene wants no high colour. It is supreme without it.

In every feature of this scene there is a reflection to confound the theorist in reform. The figuring of the very fields, their irregularity, and varying size confound him. It has taken centuries to work out a plan like this, centuries of character and endeavour. The theorist is ready to work out something better on a bit of paper!

The whole pageant as one sees it from the hanger,

is a set of illustrations in the growth of England. It is history in landscape. Anyone who knows the story of the land, will see at once the significance in the figuring of many of the fields, small and large, and the way they dovetail in one with another. Imagine the conceit of the man who thinks that he can invent something to improve on this nation-old system! He has a theory in the air to replace a practice in the earth. He has something ready-made and untried to replace a thing that has slowly grown and steadily been tried through the best part of a thousand years.

I do advise anybody who is playing with theories in the air, and yet has some sense of humour, to go up to the downs or hangers in August and view the harvest scene. If that immense reality does not bring him into touch with truth and fact, nothing can.

III

St. Ronan's was of the old order on the land. I shall take for illustration another character in our literature who was quite as sinister a figure in his way as St. Ronan's—Sir Aylmer Aylmer, "that almighty man." It is so very easy to cite many noble examples of this old English order that one need not fear to cite one or two harsh ones. The central figure of "Aylmer's Field" is essentially a poet's character creation, but I cite him because he does answer well to the legend—a true and fine legend—of pride in forefathers and of continuous holding of the land.

"Sir Aylmer Aylmer in his Aylmerism" would make a telling text for a cheap and shallow sermon against the whole class he stood for. Very likely he has already been used for that end. I recall him for another.

Sir Aylmer Aylmer is an instance of a family of the old order dying out through its own fault or misfortune—perhaps the two together. It is a story of rare power, and in the main, despite its romantic vein, true enough to life and human nature. The Aylmer pride and habit of exclusion concentrating in one strong, harsh nature bring to ruin an ancient line. The whole estate is broken up past recognition; the hall itself is levelled with the ground:

> "And where the two contrived their daughter's good
> Lies the hawk's cast. The mole has made his run,
> The slow-worm creeps, and the thin weasel there
> Follows the mouse, and all is open field."

The story of St. Ronan's Well and the story of Aylmer's Field, with their widely different ends, are alike in this one thing—the entire responsibility of the owner in both cases. St. Ronan's estate was saved wholly by the work of Mowbray; Aylmer's Field was spoiled wholly by the work of Sir Aylmer Aylmer. Neither was interfered with for good or evil by a deliberate and artificial influence from outside. Both were allowed to dree their own weird.

The saving of St. Ronan's and the ruin of Aylmer's Field were due to natural causes; not in the least

degree to the political schemer and theorist, friend or foe. Therein lies their value for illustration.

Aylmer's Field died out—the power, the title, the whole little countryside it stood for—through the fault of Aylmer's Field. We feel that the great man's fate was deserved. The bark—in the imagery of the story itself—was wrecked through "the pilot's guilt . . . the captain's knowledge"—δράσαντι παθεῖν.

If the old order of the land dies out through its own defect, no one who cares for the good of the country will wish to prop it up; artificial support of a thing in natural decay cannot be good for any society or country. If the old order of the land to-day in England were Aylmerism, or not better than St. Ronan's before St. Ronan's recovered himself and built up his estate anew, it would deserve to die out; and they would not be wise and farseeing friends of our countryside who tried by artificial aid and scheme to save or revive it.

The point is that the old order of the land is *not* mere Aylmerism. The master of Aylmer's Field did represent the old tradition of family and of continuous holding through a long stretch of time. But only the mind that is quite uninformed, or that sets out to be unfair, could find in Sir Aylmer's over-pride and harshness the marks of the order he belonged to.

* * * * *

The harvest scene from the beech hanger includes a long list of changes in holding since I first knew it

in boyhood. The changes have been great in the style of tenant as well as in the name of owner. One recalls quite clearly, for example, the last of the jovial race of sporting farmers on these wild downlands. They lived the generous life of men whose names stood well at the bank in the market town. They had time to shoot partridges in the old style in September—we walked up the birds on those hills and coombes until lately—and I remember two or three who were well-known figures at the hunt in the eighties. At least one of these stout, comfortable men could tell a racy story of mighty Assheton Smith himself in the hunting-field.

The class has died out among those downs and valleys: I doubt if a single example of the type lingers there. They lived too well for ill times. The class that filled their place was at the other pole of life on the land; the class of men who worked like—even harder than—their own farm hands; men with scarcely more luxuries than their carter and ploughman had. The spirit of the hunt was in these men, but I never knew of one of them in that country who actually took part in it. Shooting was the only pleasure which exalted master over man; and even in this spot they would have an eye to livelihood and saving. The southern farmer, new style, was quite as far removed from the old race as the "Northern Farmer, New Style," in Tennyson from his ale-drinking forerunner who stubbed Thurnaby Waäste.

He was—and he is—a rather dingy figure compared with the old race. He stints more than he spends. He was—and is—a constant toiler in trifles and his wife has the same habit. It may not be altogether a lovely life to the view of an idealist. But these men endured through years at least as lean as those which broke the race that had its balance at the bank. The England I see from this steep beech hanger owes much to them, and many other parts of the country must owe the same.

The old sporting worthy went in the natural course of things. He died out, say, partly through his fault, partly his misfortune. There was one of the natural, inevitable changes. We can regret the loss of him on the ground of sentiment, but we must be glad of the rise of the new race on the ground of common sense.

Without that somewhat drab figure always in working clothes—I never saw him in riding-breeches among those rude downs—Thurnaby might to-day be largely waäste again—

"Nowt at all but bracken an' fuzz!"

In the new tenant for the old we have then an instance of the natural change in this high harvest scene. I believe that all attempts to arrest or defeat it would have been bad. The land of the downs at this place had no more use for the old style of tenant who throve there when prices and profits were high. His race, which had been a long and good one, was run.

Quality had smiled when it met him at the cover-side or in his gig on the turnpike road, and quality had often been quite right to value him, for on the whole he might fairly have boasted with the hero of Thurnaby Waäste—

"Fur they knaws what I beän to Squoire sin fust a coom'd to the 'All;
I done moy duty boy Squoire and I done moy duty boy hall."

The change in the style of owner has been in one way a great contrast to the change in the style of tenant. The new man to farm the land came often with little or no money; the new man to own the land came often with a flush of money. The old owner on this hard down country has died out in many cases, I admit, through natural cause. Sometimes it has been the fault in the family, sometimes the ill-fortune. Whichever it was, he went, I believe, because the land had done with him. A new period had opened, and he was not fitted to it. So far as the old owners—and the new ones—have gone and are going through natural cause, one can only regret the change in one's mood of sentiment, not in one's mood of common sense. It is evolution. The old must go in such a case, though there is no new as yet to replace it.

But the change going on to-day happens sometimes not to be evolution at all. It is not a change in nature, but an artful change; and looking at the thing as a

detached outsider, one sees anger and greed at the root of it.

The best of the old—best because it is old and has been constant and has endured through hard years—is being forced off the land with a set scheme. And with the old are going many of the new men who took the place of families worn out ten or twenty years ago. The scene from the hanger supplies one with not a few names that bear witness to this; and wherever we go in Southern England it is much the same.

The best of the old order is being driven out, and with it the new, just when the land is mending and the whole system could be steadied by small ownership. But it is not in the scheme to steady, because the idea is to shake and bring down; and it is not in the scheme to rebuild, because an architect is wanting.

IV

What have the theorists in the air to set against the long centuries of practice in the earth that made the land system we have in England to-day? They have a plaything in paper which they style "Nationalization"—a word that may or may not be good Latin, but anyhow sounds vile English. It is not easy to take the idea quite gravely; still, it is hugged by people who believe themselves to be much in earnest. This doctrine is to bring us peace and abundance. It is to

increase the fruits of the earth at least twofold. By it no man is to own wholly the plot of land he cultivates; but, instead, he is to own in some infinitesimal part the plot of every cultivator in the Kingdom. The State is to own wholly; and, as every man is the State, every man will own in part.

But not only the actual cultivators of the soil will under "Nationalization" be petty landlords, fractional landlords, in principle, through the State, all over the country from Land's End to John o' Groats —though they must not own fully their own little plot; the folk who live in the towns and work in the factories will equally be landowners, too. Immeasurable ignorance about the soil and the things that grow in it and the seasons will not at all disqualify.

As things are now, in the reign of practice, the land is often owned by those who do know and care somewhat about such matters; as things are to be in the reign of theory the land will be owned by many millions who know nought about such matters.

We often hear a man who has worked hard in a town trade or calling or in one of the Colonies, and has made or is making a little money, say he would like to own a piece of land in England—it would make him feel, he thinks, that he had a solid stake in the Empire. But commonly it ends in a patriotic wish. To own that piece of England means a risk and responsibility which deter him. His training has been in another field of action, and he wisely judges that

he had better not engage in a new and very hard venture he knows nothing of. The "Nationalizer" is ready with a plan on paper to change this with all the ease in the world.

Henceforward, every man, whether he aspire to it or not, is to be a landowner in theory, if no man is to be one in practice!

We shall no longer fear to dabble in things we have not studied through long and hard experience. The State shall dabble in them on our behalf! We shall own—in theory—and yet not feel the risk or heavy burden of owning. Shall we not all securely become mine-owners without knowing how a shaft is sunk, factory-owners without knowing where the factories are or what it is they make?

Why should we not all become, quite as ably, landowners without knowing a threshing-machine from a cutter and binder?

That, however, is a very small part of the profit to come when we mount from the inferno of land practice to the paradise of land theory. It seems that by some hidden virtue, if not in the soil, at least in the Socialism, two grains of wheat shall shoot where but one grain shoots now. Good things of the earth, perhaps, will spring spontaneously. It reminds me or the map of the brand-new thriving city of Eden that hung in Scadder's office—the city where man was "bound to man in one vast bond of equal love and truth."

"Heyday! What's that?" asked Martin Chuzzlewit as his eye fell on a great plan which filled a whole side of the office.

"That's Eden," said Scadder.

"Why, I had no idea it was a city."

"Hadn't you? Oh, it's a city."

"I suppose," said Martin, "there are several architects there?"

"There ain't a single one," said Scadder.

"The soil being very fruitful, public buildings grows spontaneous, perhaps," said Mark Tapley.

Nobody knew a humbug better than Dickens, and the blessed Eden of our theorists in the air should be the very spot for his hard Scadders and his soft Jellabys.

* * * * *

It is good to forget these dealers in empty doctrine and go up to drink deep of the great scene of reality that opens out from the beech and oak hanger. Since I began to write on the hanger and its scene the season has turned. It was summer at this spot despite wet and grey sky very lately. It is now autumn in everything but the calendar. Not falling leaves prove this sudden change, for they were beginning to turn and fall nearly a month ago. Besides, new leaves are springing everywhere; the oak underwood and some of the oak-trees are at the full of their second spring —that time that comes with the second flowering of the honeysuckle.

What proves autumn absolute to me is, first, the little pinch in the air on a bright morning after the wet; and, second, that almost complete strain of the redbreast which began to sing again a month ago, but then only in fragments that once or twice I hardly recognized as redbreast notes. One always feels the redbreast strain at the first phase of autumn to be a very signal feature of the natural year in England. It is wonderful. It is interwoven most subtly with the whole spirit of the season. It suits the storms of the autumn, but, equally on this high and lonely place with the wide sweep of farms and downs and elmy villages, it suits the calm to-day.

Where the coppice feathers off and the hanger breaks into open down, is a small field of mixed grasses with a history I wish I knew well. It would throw light on the fortunes of humble families of late years related to the soil. It would illustrate how a poor man may rise to be his own master and a landowner. This is a rough little field with a shed in one corner such as any village handyman can build with some boards and posts, with tin sheeting for a roof, and dead bracken or furze for walls. It might have been bought ten or fifteen years ago—I think it actually was bought about then—for a sum in gold a working village man might have scraped together by the savings of twenty years or so, and kept, according to his intelligence in finance, in the savings bank or an old teapot.

There is no road to the field, only a deep, rutted

lane along the edge of a wood, where the right of way is very doubtful; and there is a footpath from the village, that winds over the winterbourne, through the fields, and up the side of the hanger, which, I should say, is a good right, though a stile or two that way forbids the cow or horse—they have to be driven or led, I think, up the lane used for carting away faggots and wattle hurdles.

The field was owned till a few years ago by a man who rose by cow's milk—first one cow, which he fed on common land or by the roadside; then several, and this bit of ground on which he knocked up his own shed. I believe he began by retailing the milk round the village, but later, as his stock grew, the railway milk-can was needed. This man never rose to be "a farmer" outright; he fell off the rick he had piled up himself, whilst he was thatching it or cutting hay, and ended there. But, if not one of the keenest and ablest of the class of villagers who rise to be their own masters, he was a fair example of what hard work and the saving habit can do.

It is this type of man we want to fortify the weak spots in our land system to-day. We do need a large number of small men, small owners, small freeholders, securely planted on the soil all over our country. It is a vital, a supreme necessity, I believe. Only, looking over the harvest scene from the little rough grass field, one sees at once that it would be absurd to think of planting the whole of that wide sweep of country

with the type. The peopling of the district, the railway system in it, the scattered villages, and the small towns far apart, the nature of the soil, all are against it. We should want a new Ordnance map and a new history of England, with the old ones quite wiped out, for the venture. Such schemes might be very well for the walls of Scadder's office or the airy Edens of "Nationalization"; they are not for the Ordnance map of real life. I shall return to this matter of the small man on the land. It is a tremendously pressing English question.

CHAPTER IV

THE ENGLISH SQUIRE

"Tell me, knife-grinder, how came you to grind knives?
Did some rich man tyrannically use you?
Was it the squire? or parson of the parish?
Or the attorney?"

IT is more than a hundred years since the squib was printed in the *Anti-Jacobin*, but the whole is so fresh and topical it might have been written for to-day. "The Friend of Humanity" and "the needy knife-grinder" are both on the scene to-day; the squire and the parson and the attorney are still here; and the Chequers too. There is only wanting the gift of Canning, who hit the thing off in a flash of his brilliant wit. That particular knife-grinder, when Humanity met him, had a hole in his hat and a hole in his breeches, and his wheel was out of gear. He was the kind of figure that could be picked up, with a little searching, on most highways, though it might be hard to find another needy knife-grinder so perfect in his candour—

"Story! God bless you, I have none to tell, Sir,
Only last night, a-drinking at the Chequers,
This poor old hat and breeches, as you see, were
Torn in a scuffle."

He was hauled off by the village policeman before Justice Oldnixon, who put him in the stocks for a vagrant. The end of the squib will be recalled by anyone who has read Canning: the friend of Humanity changes his tone, calls the knife-grinder "wretch," kicks him, "overturns his wheel, and exit in a transport of republican enthusiasm and universal philanthropy."

"*I* give thee sixpence! I will see thee d——d first—
Wretch! whom no sense of wrongs can rouse to vengeance;
Sordid, unfeeling, reprobate, degraded,
Spiritless outcast!"

Was Canning really writing of the life and custom of his own time, or had he, like true genius, an eye that saw far into the future? Certainly there never could have been a time when Humanity was more often on the English highways in search of knife-grinders than to-day. It is not long since rather a delicate story came to me, part in print, part oral, of the meeting of the two in some out-of-the way spot in the country. The friend goes in this case for a long walk in the country in search of Humanity. The roads are lonely, the people few. Not only does the friend look in vain for the knife-grinders, he looks long in vain for squires. It seems to him as if all the land, a beautiful but to his view a barren land, is held by a sort of fund-lords, as Cobbett styled bankers or financiers, and there is, of course, the usual terrible warning to trespassers. At last a man is seen working near

the road, and the friend steps aside to talk with him. The knife-grinder is communicative. He amazes the friend by telling how he has saved quite a "tidy" sum, put it under the thatch—either at home or in the village savings bank—and ended by buying his own house. Imagine the joy of the friend on finding a knife-grinder of such mettle as this—no need even to ask him :

> "Was it the squire for killing of his game, or
> Covetous parson for his tithes distraining,
> Or roguish lawyer, made you lose your little
> All in a law suit ?"

So the friend does not kick the knife-grinder ; he pats him on the back, and by-and-by goes his way rejoicing in the thrift and good sense of the English peasant ; but, going, he needs must picture the surprise, the anger of "the squire" on learning how the serf has dared rise to be his own freeholder !

But the friend was not imaginative enough, otherwise he might have pictured a further scene, a scene in real life, where the troubled knife-grinder seeks the squire and shows an alarming, puzzling bit of paper with threats of pain and penalty—a fine, perhaps of £50, nearly the whole value of that cottage which is his castle. So it is not always "the squire for the killing of his game," nor "covetous parson for his tithes distraining," that so despitefully uses the knife-grinders to-day ! There is another party altogether set against the poor knife-grinder. Is there not

to be reckoned with "the attorney," that great attorney the State?

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Canning's sapphics are valuable, partly through their brilliant banter and partly because they show how old the rancour is among the gentle hypocrites against the English squire. No doubt it may be argued that Canning, though on the side of humanity if ever an English statesman was so, was not of the party of knife-grinders. It is true he was not. Canning was writing in the *Anti-Jacobin*. He was by birth, and in mind and training, the Anti-Jacobin. So one must agree he had a bias, and that bias not in favour of the knife-grinders. But, then, one needs not Canning's lines to know the falseness of that old-new outcry against a class of men who have been so great a part of English country life since England began. There are certain things about the English squire, not this individual or that, but the class, which are accepted. They are not things of opinion, points of view, questions of taste—they are facts. One of these is his ample excellence as a class.

I think Dickens in one of his stories describes a man fond of doing up his opinions in brown paper parcels, tying them round, and placing them on shelves, with strict orders that they must not be disturbed. The habit is very irritating where private opinions are concerned, and we feel we have a perfect right to untie the parcels of people like these and

scatter the contents. But the broad excellence of the English country squire in the making and keeping of England has nothing to do with private opinion or party bias. One might as well say that the glory of Shakespeare, or the value of Magna Carta, or the oratory of Fox, or the brain of Burke, or the patriotism of Hampden, or the service of Nelson in winning Trafalgar, was a matter of opinion. The general feeling and the set tradition of English people has decided once and for all about these things. They have been accepted as *facts*, and have simply passed into our history. They are fixed and immutable as dates —we accept them as we accept 1066 and 1689.

The English archer, the English yeoman, and the English country squire—we do not think they *may* or may not have been, we know they *have* been, excellent figures, master workers in the making and keeping of England.

A very great body of tradition, word of mouth and printed, must be behind a thing like this before it can pass clean out of the region of opinion into the region of fact. It must not merely be thought by this or that curious student or deep historian; it must be felt by the country. There is such a tradition about the English squire. Nothing is clearer in the story of England than that on the whole, and right through, the squires have been a good class that has done its work well.

Outside our party contests, outside the game of

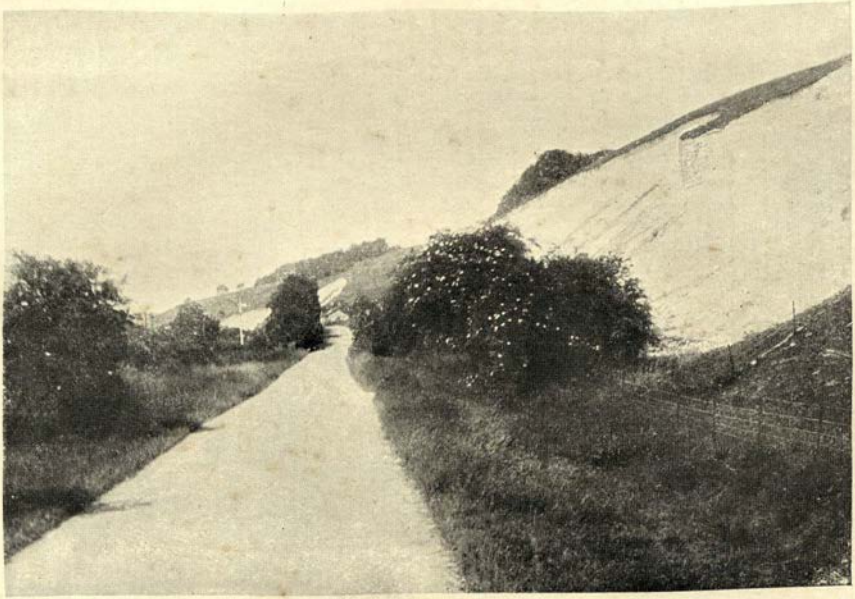
politics, "an English country squire" long ago became a term expressing directness and simplicity and a single-minded habit of life. It was even used quizzically by people inclined to make light of character and conduct not complex; "country squire" became in their mouths almost what Trench called an immoral word.

Such has been the squire. He is all through the books: Sir Roger de Coverley—"We love him," said Thackeray, "for his vanities as well as for his virtues"—and Bracebridge, and Thurnaby, and Locksley Hall—

> "Served the poor, and built the cottage, raised the school, and drained the fen."

He is in a hundred other authentic prints. Still more, far more convincing, he is a national tradition which, when the mass is great as this, stands for known truth.

It is hard or hopeless to set people at all intelligent and fair against tradition like this; the authority of it is too long and too thorough. The shrewder "comrade," or communist, or Socialist, knows this very well. He feels he is about as likely to assure the world that the tradition of the squire is false as that *habeas corpus*, or John Bull, or the Royal Exchange, is a fiction. So he has ridden off on a new line. The tradition may have been all very well in its time, he allows, but the whole system it sprang from is outworn now. The days for it are past. Let us supplant



ALBION.

this hoary old tradition without violence. Let us buy it out root and branch. Let us buy it with fairness—buy it with the money of somebody else.

"England cannot begin again," was the text of a speech by Disraeli. But the Socialist who is going to change the face of the English countryside is hot to begin England again. After all, as he is to begin human nature again, may he not start with the English nature? The buying out of the squires is his first step. Next, he must break down the whole of the vast and complex body of custom and habit and interdependence which are country life in England: the body which has been growing and endlessly modifying since the start of the thing. Finally, having worked back to the virgin soil—or the prairie value—of English country life, he will sow his strictly theoretic seed and wait for the crop of his imagination.

I have suggested that the "Blessed Eden" of the "nationalizer," where even the public buildings will spring spontaneous, would be good soil for those hard humbugs and those soft ones who live in Dickens's stories, the Scadders and the Jellabys. There is another type in one of those books, named Bitzer. He was not a pleasing man, but he had at least a watchful sense of the absurd. When it was urged that gambling was immoral, he was quick to show it was worse—it was ridiculous. A Bitzer or two might be a useful corrective in the land theorists' councils.

CHAPTER V

A CRITIC OF SQUIRES

THERE is a sort of fashion to-day in Cobbett—Cobbett, that unsparing critic of many of the squires a hundred years ago. Cobbett truly was English to the core. The "Rides" is a real work. It is a masterpiece of print, with all its monstrous conceit and its grotesque prejudice—its prejudice against pines and potatoes, bank-notes, and that knuckle-end of England, as Sydney Smith called the Scottish race. There appears to be not one line of dead words in the "Rides"; and even many of the most ferocious and most obscure political wrangles are half worth musing over for the force of the wording—one finds oneself glancing through them, italics and all, without any particular wish to know the rights of the dispute, but just because the English is so very good—of its kind.

There is a burly fellow behind the words, doubtless blustering too much at times, but firmly set on his saddle, and uncommonly good company on the highway. We who only know or only care about the book of his Rides can hardly think of Cobbett a-foot at all. We can just imagine him dismounted and buy-

ing and bragging about his cheap whips at Weyhill Fair, or sitting down at the farmers' dinner in one of the market towns he turned to again and again. But, on the whole, we see him always most distinctly in the saddle. He is cut out as cleanly and clearly there as a figure on bright new coin.

One may picture Assheton Smith out of the saddle as soon as one may picture Cobbett. Cobbett, by the way, names Assheton Smith in one or two of his rides, speaking of some severe sentence on a poacher who attacked Squire Smith's gamekeepers. What would have happened if, instead of riding round and round Dundas, near Highclere, and waiting for a horse-whipping, Cobbett had ridden round Assheton Smith at a hunt in the Tedworth country hard by? As a boy I knew one or two ancients of that hunt who rode to hounds with the iron squire, and one has the notion that he would never have taken a cross look or act from any living man in the field. It *would* be possible, it would be inevitable, to think of Cobbett and his horse parting company had he and Smith crossed crops, and possibly as a result "Rural Rides" would have been poorer in pictures of at least that part of England.

It is because the book treats so largely of downs and towns and little villages and rough lonely roads in that Assheton Smith country that I first came to read and value it. Cobbett in his rides west and south-west from the Wen, as he nicknamed London in a flash

of genius, often drew rein at a little old red-brick farmhouse, which is one of my earliest reminiscences. The Old Familiar Faces that Charles Lamb lamented include sometimes, besides the faces of schoolmates and companions, those of houses. One grows up with houses and comes to know their features, their expressions, as one knows those of human beings. There is an unforgettable line by Rogers in which he describes the chairs of his old home revisited awaking the feelings of a friend—

> "As o'er the dusky furniture I bend
> Each chair awakes the feelings of a friend."

Mr. Hueffer has touched the same chord in a wonderfully true passage in one of his books where an old chair is brought out on to the lawn for a family sale. Houses and their old precincts undisturbed have the same power, but stronger. This little red-brick house, backed by great rookery elms, and its walled garden, has exercised the power, and when I learnt from village history that this was the place Cobbett often made for, and praised for its excellent free quarters, I plunged into his "Rides" and found it one of the most interesting books I had ever read.

Some men have an eye for geology, but some men have an eye for the earth. Cobbett was of the latter class. He was one of those rare people who can note the lie of the land, and by word of mouth or of pen describe it in a few absolutely effective sentences. I

stayed for rabbit shooting a day or two one winter in Cobbett's free quarters with a friend who had this gift of seeing and quickly understanding the character of a bit of countryside. I did not tell him that in the room we breakfasted and supped Cobbett had breakfasted and dined eighty years ago, and that therein he, with, it is said, his Roman Catholic host, had plotted against the rule of the day; for it might have spoilt his supper and his sport. How he would have hated the ghost of Cobbett!

In not disliking Cobbett's ghost myself, I am acting in not quite a loyal spirit to my own forbears. It is true Cobbett in his "Rides" does not set upon any of them with the truculence he sets upon some of the folk in that part of England. He never rode round them as he rode round Dundas; or to and fro with his son in front of their house cracking his whip and hullabalooing as he did against the poor hoaxed parson at Botley. But on his way to and from Mr. Blount's he would often pass their land and dwelling, and the best relations I can imagine between the old Tory squire and the revolutionist—for Cobbett must have appeared in that light to the neighbourhood—are relations of armed neutrality.

Cobbett, then, does not fall foul of that particular squire—who was not one of the "fund-lords." Perhaps Mr. Blount, who provided the free quarters, gave Cobbett a kind account of him and his treatment of the poor in the Manor; but I rather fancy

from a passage in the "Rides" that Cobbett was for teaching the squire all the same how to plant hazels better. "I see some plantations of ash and of hazel have been made along here; but with great submission to the planters I think they have gone the wrong way to work . . . they have brought the bottom soil to the top; and that is *wrong* always. . . . I know that some people will say that this is a *puff*, and let it pass for that; but if any gentleman that is going to plant will look at my 'Book on Gardening'——"

Cobbett was dead sure he knew all about hazel-trees, as he was that he knew all about the acacia or locust-tree of the "Rides" which was to work such wonders in England—if cultivated according to Cobbett; but I have not the smallest doubt the gentlemen went on planting hazels without deigning to look at "my 'Book on Gardening,'" which would come under the heading of "Twopenny Trash." Who could expect an Old English country squire to consult a firebrand on the practice of forestry?

Cobbett's theories, indeed, seem to have been the weakest part of Cobbett, as they are of most strong men. Who minds to-day his pet prejudices about acacia-trees, about pines and potatoes and paper money? He stamped and bridled at Scotsmen as "feelosafers," and the Quakers he wrote down as "vermin." But there was this merit about his theories—he did believe in them with quite a tremendous belief. He held his theories: they were tenets. He did not

hint or hesitate them. People knew at any rate what he would be at.

Cobbett of the "Rides" was plainly a Philistine. I am rather surprised to find the cult in Cobbett spreading, if mildly, among those who are for sweetness and light, and—like Disraeli—on the side of the angels. For Cobbett beyond question was a thumping kind of fellow, with a habit of gross language at times, and with a scorn for the refinements. He was not a soul. He was out-and-out of the earth earthy.

Besides, when he could for a while—as I think in his rides he often did—forget Pitt and Peel and the parsons and paper money and pines and the Reformation, he could show a full vein of common sense, which in this world always will be clashing with things of the Spirit. He rode about counting the corn-stacks and collecting all manner of facts about the roads and the roots, sheep, cattle, farmhouses, market towns; and the odd thing is that these facts, utterly out of date, are quite interesting to a reader of Cobbett to-day. A warmth of observation lights the "Rides," and has much to do, I think, with keeping the work alive. Cobbett's mere catalogues are often quite good, better than a great deal of his criticism. The man gives out heat.

Riding along the turnpike—where in years that do not come again I have ridden how many hundreds of times alone!—Cobbett conveys to one something like a bodily sense of warmth on a chill autumn after-

noon. It is always afternoon near dusk when I picture Cobbett on the road. It is chill . . . the lights will soon begin to gleam in the far-scattered, lonely houses of the downland. . . . "The country, though so open, has its beauties. The homesteads in the bottoms, with fine lofty trees about the houses and yards, form a beautiful contrast with the large, open fields. The little villages running straggling along the dells (always with lofty trees and rookeries) are very interesting objects, even in the winter. You feel a sort of satisfaction, when you are out upon the bleak hills yourself, at the thought of the shelter which is experienced in the dwellings in the valleys."

CHAPTER VI

THE SQUIRE'S RABBITS

THE question of the English squire is, and perhaps always has been, bound up with the question of game.

Many stories have been told of Parish Councils in their early days when they had all the charm of newness and we talked of village Witans; but the story I recall most clearly relates to a day when the freshness of the thing was waning, and in some places it was hard at times to find a quorum, much less a gallery. However, here was both quorum and gallery, for the rumour had gone out that a newcomer to the place, who was said to be something of a revolutionist in his way, meant to be at the next meeting and to speak. The dark horse came. He spoke, and the gallery listened in stony silence. But at the close, when he vowed that Parish Councils and the Act were "all humbug," the gallery was suddenly articulate. It woke. It burst into one loud, startling cheer, and then it dispersed.

The cause of the cheer was not to be sought in any persuasive argument in that speech. The cheer came from a group of men who had somehow got it

fixed in their heads, when these councils started, that two things were at length to be more or less pooled in the parish and divided up and paid out. One was land, the other was that which so often lays land waste —the rabbits; and of the two it was doubtless the rabbit which had chiefly kindled their enthusiasm.

Wherever rabbits burrow or lie about in "forms" at the surface I have found it the same in England—they are a matter of extravagant interest to a great number of country people. The town imagination is not much stirred by rabbits. Perhaps a townsman who is invited by a farmer to come down and have a little rabbit-shooting at Christmas, or in August when the corn is cut, will show an intelligent curiosity and keenness in the subject. But his interest is merely that of a casual sportsman. We have only to see him pick up and carry a shot or wired rabbit to know at once he never was born and bred to it. There is the difference between the way he carries the rabbit and an expert villager would carry it that there is between the way a champion billiard-player carries a cue round the table and a man carries it who is playing his first game.

Now notice the world between this amateur and the villager in any rabbit neighbourhood in the Midlands or the South of England. Note it, for example, at any shooting party where there are beaters and "stops," and perhaps two or three keepers' followers or friends who do not themselves beat in the regular

way, but give a helping hand when needed, and will mark down birds and serve various useful offices of the kind. All these men, the rank and file and the petty officers of the party, are expert and keenly concerned in rabbits. They are much more interested when a rabbit starts running than when a pheasant starts flying. They will take or recommend risks gladly for the sake of a few rabbits being added to the bag. They have often pointed out to me rabbits running right down the line of guns or beaters, with the clear wish that I should shoot. After all, they would say, will not most of the charge go into the rabbit or into the ground? There is no doubt that a certain recklessness often marks the whole rank and file when, at the end of a beat, rabbits begin to run freely.

I never noticed that a hare or a pheasant aroused feelings of the kind. Game does not touch the imagination of the English villager in anything like the degree the rabbit touches it. The rabbit is the most democratic wild creature in England, and it is also the most popular. In that "bare and level plain" which Robert Lowe imagined, "where every ant-hill is a mountain and every thistle a forest tree," the rabbit will ever burrow.

It is not wholly a question of food—it is a question often of sport. But it is largely a question of food, and the English villager is very fond of a piece of rabbit, hot or cold, for supper. He likes it far better,

as a rule, than he would like pheasant or partridge or woodcock; to those who know the village taste, this is past dispute.

So these villagers, when they learnt for sure that rabbits were not, after all, to come under the Act, went out of Parish Council politics and ceased to take the least interest in the thing. The "circus," to recall a jest of Lord Salisbury's, was thereafter more to their taste.

One has often heard the question asked by sportsmen and others who understand country life—What would become of the game if the theorists had their way and bought up all the land in the name of the State? The answer usually is that there would be no game left. It is quite true as to partridges and pheasants. Under Socialism there will be no room for shooting-syndicates. When all those wild wastes now kept for "selfish sport" are made fruitful, what chance will there be for the game?

So the pheasants and partridges will go, and with them will go doubtless the foxes. But the rabbits are a very different matter. They will linger. They will reassert themselves in many spots. The rabbit will outlive the revolution.

And when all the land and all the goods of the country have been "nationalized" and pooled and—presumably—divided up and doled or let out, under what rule will the rabbits come? I put it to the young dreamers of Socialist societies. If they think for one

moment the rabbit does not matter, that it is an absurd trifle, let them spend their next holiday in any typical village in rabbit England, and mix with the farmers and labourers and odd workers, and judge for themselves of the importance of the animal.

If the inquirer will make a close study of the matter, he will find that the villager can distinguish to quite a fine shade between the merits of this rabbit and that. I have seen the Arabs in the meat-markets of the desert gauging to a nicety the relative values of numbers of little bits of black-looking meat on the street stalls between which to my unknowing eye there seemed no difference in weight or worth. So it is with the villager and the rabbit. He is a connoisseur in conies.

The most delicate compliment that can be paid to many a working man is a compliment in conies. I am glad to think it very often is paid him by the squire or the farmer, to judge by the village worker we see often at this time of year going home in the evening with a rabbit—not an illicit rabbit bulging out a pocket suspiciously, but one carried bodily and happily in the hand for all the world to see.

The rabbit, then, really counts, and the idealists and "comrades" of the societies that deal in theory must not run away from the rabbit. When all things are "nationalized," the rabbit will have to be "nationalized" with the rest. But how will they do it? I foresee many pitfalls and burrows into which theory

will stumble. One might just imagine a communism or a collectivism in cavies or in cats. One might just imagine it in pigs or in ponies. But who could conceive of it in conies?

The "nationalization" of rabbits must change all the old country custom and way of looking at things. There will be no more delicate compliments in conies, no more *charity*, that shocking word to the "comrade" ear! The beater will not be insulted by a rabbit at the end of the day—for one thing, there will be no more beaters.

But the rabbits will go on; and I wonder what will happen when the villager is told that these rabbits no longer belong to any particular man—indeed, by the time the revolution reaches rabbits, will any man own anything in particular? I wonder what will happen when he is brought to understand that the era of individualism in rabbits is ended and the era of collectivism or communism in rabbits has started instead. My idea is there will be a great trade for a time in wire.

Competition is to be mended—or clean ended—when all the land and the goods of the country are "nationalized." When each man gets his equal or fair share of things, no one is to compete against his neighbour. The sense of honour, so we understand, will keep men from wishing for more than their share of pay or less than their share of work in Elysium.

But will it keep them really from the rabbits when

the rabbits have lost a definite owner? One distrusts the notion of an honour rooted in rabbits. If I know the English villager at all, his way of looking at things, and his love of sport—that very old and ruling instinct which the Socialist takes no account of—the "nationalization" of the land can only result in a furious competition for conies.

As it is, wires under the Ground Game Act and under no Act abound in many English places. But when it is understood that the rabbit belongs to the State, and that every man is the State, shall we not be caught in and thrown by wires in every direction?

CHAPTER VII

THE SQUIRE'S PHEASANTS

HOW few things are there much better to look on than homely landscape of England on a keen, bright morning in autumn! There are days mild, or with a little sting in the air, when this familiar scene of some of the best years of one's life really seems as good as any through the seasons—good almost as the high crest of mid-summer. The kind of morning I mean comes after the leaves, or the great bulk of the leaves, are down. Then woods and hedgerows and whole field landscapes where the plough has lately been at work have a look of excellent cleanness and freshness. Who that knows landscape does not know that look in Nature? Who has not been struck and pleased by it anew year after year? Sometimes in November or December it is always seen in that grand old medley of farms and woods and parks and commons. It is England absolute in autumn. A sickly appearance is often about the woods and hedges just before the turn of the leaf, and in some lights all things seem spent and miserably shabby; and this look may be repeated in a somewhat different form just at the end of the turn, when the

leaves have lost the best of their glow and colour. We feel then the sooner the trees are quite bare again the better. But once the leaves are well down and the clear sparkling autumn day comes in, all that sense of loss and death in Nature is gone. This is the morning in "James Lee's Wife":

> "Oh good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth
> This autumn morning!"

Such mornings, in an English countryside sprinkled over with woods and commons and with plenty of good ploughland, give a tone to us. They brace people up for exercise in the open as much as any mornings in the year. They make that physical appeal which is such a great part of the pleasure of the two English field sports of autumn and winter; the keen, clear morning, after rain or during frost, is the time above all to engage with zest in the English field sport of shooting.

Rather crabbed—or else very careless—tongues talk sourly, or they talk lightly, of the field pursuits, shooting and hunting, as the pleasure of the few and the selfish. Have they any idea how bounden these things are with the whole immemorial habit of country England to-day? The old order changes in many forms, the style of owner, the style of tenant, most of the outward fashions of our country life. But there has been no change in the feeling for sport. The love of the chase is as ruling this day among, not the

selfish few, but among the many—selfish or not—as it has been since the time of the Norman King and the Forest Law.

One may leave the third field sport, angling, out of this account. It belongs to a somewhat different genre. It is not attacked in the same spirit in which shooting or hunting are attacked. It is not supposed to stand in the light of the land theorist or land revolutionist as these two others are. If he sees in it a vice at all, he sees in it at most a "solitary vice," not a social one, as with shooting and hunting. The Chartist in "Alton Locke" is inclined to be a little hurt, and on his manhood, when he passes a stream and sees one who clearly is not a Chartist fishing for trout; but, if I remember right, he is beguiled or amused by the graceful action of the rod and line. So, after watching a little while, he goes on his way without grudging the angler the pleasure. That, perhaps, expresses well enough the attitude to-day of our "sowre-complexioned man," as the old seventeenth-century writer called him, to the pastime of angling. It seems to him, on the whole, a harmless sort of trifling with life—not worth the powder and shot of his invective.

Hunting and shooting come under a very different head, and of the two shooting is to the sowre complexion the worse offender. Macaulay's Puritans hated bear-baiting, not because it was a pain to the bear, but because it was pleasure to the baiter. One

might sometimes suspect that the land theorist hates pheasant shooting because it is pleasure to the shooter, not because it may be pain to the pheasant. But this may be but a side issue of his dislike, the result of some atrobile in him. He chiefly and frankly hates the field sport of shooting on quite another ground—he hates it as a powerful interest against his plan for breaking up the order of country life in England.

What the land revolutionist and theorist fails to see is not that field sports are a power against him; he knows this well enough. What he has missed completely is that these field sports are greatly liked, and generally liked, by the average country worker and villager—a fact as true and sure as anything we know about village life. The English villager has the innate passion for sport. It is in blood and bone with him. He may enjoy it merely as an onlooker, or merely in the humble calling of beater, or the lowlier one still of "stop"; it does not matter—his heart is in it. I have been shooting in the fields and woods since childhood, and I have always been struck by the zest with which these men enter into sport. Beaters and camp-followers generally of the party—they all enter into it heartily.

It is the rabbit, as I have said, that is always the most popular feature of the day. It is the rabbit certainly which is the chief source of their joy. The rabbit is the cynosure of every village eye in the chase.

But the whole thing powerfully attracts and interests them. No one who has shot much in England and talked with beaters and stops and the casuals or sutlers of a shooting party can question the sporting instinct of an English villager.

"Nationalization" must put a close to all that; for, really, how can you have shooting, yet have Socialism? Shooting cum Socialism must mean, I suppose, pheasants for all. We might as well propose at once to have peacocks for all.

But there are land idealists who, frightened at the logic of their own theory, will run a little way off from it, and at a safe distance they will protest that "pheasants for all" or "peacocks for all" is a gross caricature of the noble theory. In the kind of Utopia they will propose there will be room for distinctions —even peacocks and pheasants for *some*. The method of selection, the choosing of these some, has yet to be worked out—in theory. It is to be worked out by the clever men in Utopia by-and-by—on paper.

A great English statesman, speaking of a certain class of "middling men," defined them as "meaning very little, nor meaning that little well." The saying fits rather nicely these middling men of the land theory who preach from the text, but shy away from the severity of it.

* * * * *

That old affection of the English villager for sport, and the ungrudging way he joins in it, is a small

matter, after all, the theorist will say; it should not bar the way of progress. I agree it is a small thing as against real progress, though an old, true thing, deeply rooted; and we can agree it should not be spared or regarded for a moment if it bars the way to a better order of life. But put this thing out of account altogether as a trifle, and there is left something past comparison greater for our theorist to displace. There is the whole body of English country custom and country thought that has come out of our land practice to be done away with. All that must be rubbed out before the slate is clean and ready for his new demonstration. We shall not merely have to start on a new grammar—we must start on a brand-new alphabet of country life. It will be more confounding than the Thermidor and the Fructidor of the French Revolution.

Shooting is a small enough matter when we measure it against the great body of country custom, then. It is a pastime, and it may be fairly argued that it ends at this. But the sport serves as an excellent example of the way in which interests and duties and the intimate relationship between class and class in country England are all worked together, woof and weft of the English broadcloth. It is easy to illustrate this. Let, for instance, a stranger to a district take a shooting, and try to enjoy it without the slightest regard to the custom and life of that place. Let him say, "I rent the land, I pay for it, I can afford to be perfectly inde-

pendent of local feeling and custom and the relations of one class with another." How soon he will discover his mistake! He will find custom and courtesy, and the camaraderie of the countryside have to do with even such a thing as this—just a pastime. Labourer, landowner, tenant, and tradesmen are all together in a bond of mutual service that is too finely ravelled for the gross vision of the Socialist. The village is a community which the Communist neither knows nor cares for a jot. But he is ready with his steam-roller, brutal and insane, to crush out its thousand wonderful years of growth and duty and service of class to class.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW ATLANTIS

IT is told of Carlyle that when he was a very young man, hot for work, he tried for any post which was vacant. He knew nothing of stars, but he applied for the post of Astronomer Royal—at least, that is the story, false or true, and only a pedant or a prig would think worse of Carlyle for it. A good man at the start of life, with a consuming passion for work, and failing day after day to find it, is too good a man to pick and choose. He is as a starving man—any food will serve, the choicest dinner of the most delicate courses or a parcel of broken victuals. That is very natural and right; the man who is eager for any work lest he continue with no work is in the right way. Work-hunger is worth in a man. But can we think as well of a certain number of people rich or poor to-day who do not know, who only half think they are land-hungry? On the face of it land-hunger is the sign of health. True, the thing has been exploited in England during the last twenty years. The name of it has been hackneyed. It has sometimes been made a cry of. Yet when hunger for land is real or native in a man, poor or rich, who can say or think

a word against it? To dispraise it seems like dispraising Nature. But we want to feel sure it *is* real. We want to feel sure that if the old class of the squires, for instance, is to be replaced, it will be replaced by men, large and small, who really have the instinct and an abiding desire for the land and for life on it. Some people are given to eating when they are not hungry; they are not sure, they think they are hungry, or will be shortly. So they eat, and indigestion follows. Now, this is exactly true of people who are not sure—or have not long been sure—who only fancy they are land-hungry. So they buy land or rent it, and ere long they, too, like the others, suffer from its pains.

I fear there are many people of this kind to-day playing with the toy of small holdings and large new estates. A few years ago I saw the start of a land experiment in a village I knew well. These little homes were freehold, and the buyers were largely English come home from the Colonies. They bought their holdings ready made and rough made—small plots of rather thin soil with a light, reddish clay. Each had its tin or its tiled building with a slip of garden. A railway-station on a main line lay a few hundred yards off—what could promise better for profit in eggs, fruit, and green stuff?

But, prejudiced, I never could take those experimental estates seriously—they differed so extremely from the thing I had known from early years, the thing

forked and scraped together, bit by bit very likely, by my old playmate, Ginger Marlpit, ex-cowboy; or by Smallpiece and Stubbit—the rude sons of Flint. And, indeed, I heard that only one worker on that land could quite chew what he had bitten off, and had his appetite at all satisfied. That man seemed to be so fixed to his bit of soil that a little way off he might have been taken for a scarecrow—to warn away other birds, gulls, so the cynics might have said.

The man, who was bone and wire, had a pitched battle with the soil. He was not as one who entered into loving intimate relations with the earth and coaxed it round. It was not mother earth but enemy earth. *He fought it.* He dug and forked and raked it, instead of ploughing it, and I think he was too much for it. When he did "let it be" for a very little while, it was merely that he might give it a stiffer dressing in the end. He drove a cart, and by driving you for an hour or so any day he made a few extra shillings, and so was able, being in pocket, to drive the land all the more for the next few days.

By now—for that was some years ago—his bit of soil ought to be quite clean, unless the thistles and dandelions have seeded too freely on his neighbour's holdings. Perhaps the whole settlement has pulled round. I cannot tell. I hope it has, though there seems to me, when I pass it in the train, too much tin and wire about, and the tiles look red as ever.

But if they are still the wrong kind of holder and

holding, they are not the only new comers who have gone wrong in land. One can be wrong—tremendously, childishly wrong—as a big holder too. "Latifondo" is probably all wrong; I was told it was one of the chief curses of Sicily and of Southern Italy. But at least in "Latifondo" there is something staple. It has staying power. We have no "Latifondo" in England—though we have great estates—but here and there we have something for a while that, like "Latifondo," is big; but, unlike "Latifondo," is soft.

We have the generous, very rich man, who has made a series of fortunes out of something somewhere in New Atlantis, and, returning home, feels it a duty to buy up two or three large estates in the market. He makes of them one estate, puts a ring fence round them, turns an old manor house into a palace. The model farm itself stands for a fortune—the outlay of one. You know when you are nearing that model, for every hedge is spruce, and the roads—even public roads—seem to have been privately finished.

It is a noble experiment, and whilst it lasts a neighbourhood may thrive on it. But often it does not last. Then the ill begins. Land, when a toy, is a toy so soon tired of! Here is an example. Many times during the last two summers I have passed an experimental estate of the kind. It is splendid, and it is unlike anything else in that bit of deep, quiet English country whose feature might be described as elder and elms. The elms are wonderful even for elms, so towering,

and with such foregrounds and backgrounds of dark foliage ; whilst often, on a moist evening, how the great white disks of musky elder smell in the hedges as one walks past.

But elder and elms will not keep us on the soil when the soil no longer calls us. New Atlantis is empty. It has been empty for months, and the months are growing into years, and nobody dares or cares to handle the toy—it is so big.

I went into the village inn for my supper, and met two people who were housed there whilst their new home was being fitted up. We fell to talking of the great experiment—all talk in the neighbourhood comes round in the end, I suppose, to that—and I asked, Was it true Atlantis had found at last a new ruler, and was to be lived in again ? They told me there was not a word of truth in the story.

Then one of them said : " No ; since our fools of authorities *would* build the new county asylum at ——, I don't see what chance there is of anyone taking on Atlantis."

I looked up to see whether he was passing a jest. But he was earnest. The last thing he meant was irony. He was a payer where the rate was up ; and he thought that if the asylum authorities had not been so conceited about their precious building fads, something might have been done with the toy.

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So the high towers and fine wells and fountains

and orchards and gardens and all the other riches of Solomon's house, which were to be used here as in the Atlantis of Bacon's fable, lie vacant! It is good for the architect of the new asylum—one cannot find another who profits by it. It was fizz whilst it lasted. Everyone was up. But the fizz ended, and the cellar of that neighbourhood is full of its empty bottles.

The result of the new ring fence experiment is bad. Trade that was boomed by it has fallen lower than before Atlantis piled up—lower than before because felt more than before. Slowly, insecurely, a large staff, skilled labour and unskilled, must distribute itself. If Atlantis of the fable had been shut up, what would have become of the head-manager and the under-manager of the perfume-house and of those kitchens where they made the dishes of rare and special effects? You must be a rich man to hire the head perfumier at Atlantis rate; whisper says his rate was so high he would waive aside a tip and murmur, as the men of the fable, "What, Twice Paid!" You need be a bold one to hire him at all.

The ill of Atlantis is it cannot stay. It does not root. That sort, big or small, is no good to the soil. And I do not think much of the heart that rejoices when those who were rooted deep in the land are driven out to make room for mere annuals who come and go after their kind. What we want in England is an abundance of perennials, the small healthy plants.

We want, too, I think, the shelter and endurance of the fine timber trees.

CHAPTER IX

THE ENGLAND OF MAY

ALL that the rhapsodists say about the glory of England in the best days of the year is true. It does not matter if they gush. It does not matter how high they pile their adjectives of praise, their "sweets" and "beautifuls," and the whole set of rather sugary expressions that are used year after year to take Nature by force or by fancy. I have only to go out and be lost for a day or large part of it in any bit of green English country to know that they do not at all overrate the thing. Almost any place fairly safe from towns and new building districts will serve to prove this, if only it has that familiar English mingling of woods and lanes and farm by-roads, with some water meadows and a furze common. Indeed, to realize the exceeding splendour of May, near its height in England, we need not choose specially favoured landscapes. If we go as the whim of the moment or the gradient of the road will have it, and go deep enough, into any group of Domesday hamlets and villages, we shall get all we wish.

I have felt this truth many times in May after wandering about for a day in homely scenes of England. Starting out for some special point of view, say

a high place from which one can look round and down into five or six shires, or a place famed for both scenery and story, I have failed to reach it, yet have found a neighbouring road or piece of country serve me just as well. Certainly the New Forest about Sway and Setthorns or Holmsley and Wotton villages is a great place in that particular phase of May when the oaks are still vivid green. For that supreme oak week or ten days of the year I know of no place I would sooner go to than Sway. One day I set out to Sway with a rough itinerary in my mind that held the two Parleys—one, I think, in Dorset, the other in Hampshire—thence Hurn; and afterwards right into the depths of the Forest by Wilverley and Rhinefield. The inner Forest was the goal of the day's travel, but I never reached it, nor after the first few hours had any wish for it. By the aid of a false map, and on the road some of those casual village directions that often mislead, I lost my way in a maze of rough by-roads between the river and the western edge of the Forest. So, giving up all thought of a definite goal and of the oaks of Sway and Setthorns, I drifted anywhere till the evening, when at length I came out on a metalled road. I asked a villager which was the way to Hinton Admiral and to Christchurch. "This is Hinton Admiral —about all of it," he said, pointing to a park and a little old inn named Cat and Fiddle; "and there's the road to Christchurch, three mile."

Now, that summary of Hinton would fit well enough a succession of back hamlets hidden among beech and elm and oak I had come through since losing my way at the Forest edge. A park and an inn with a few cottages clustered round a shop of all wares is the about-all of thousands of hamlets throughout many of the best and least known parts in this "precious stone set in the silver sea . . . this realm, this England"; and for immense wealth and splendour in mid-May we need go no farther.

Three things impressed me in the twenty or thirty miles of country I came through that day, very obvious things which might appeal to the eye and thought of anyone who sets out to see and enjoy a piece of country like this at such a season. The first is purely an appeal to the eye. When all is said about the pageant of flower and flower colour in May, it remains that the fresh vivid green is really the great feature of such days in England. It is wonderful and boundless, and the chief makers of it are, I think, the oak and the beech.

The elm—a tree rare in the Forest itself, though abundant in the villages just without—was perhaps at perfection that day, but its green was not brilliant. It appeared to be a kind of grey-green in the sunlight. But what a green is that of the oaks when once they are fairly past their stage of brown and red and yellow —sometimes almost primrose yellow—of early spring! I had long thought that the most vivid and

freshest tree-green in the English spring is that early one of the larches. But looking at the oaks in May, it has seemed to me that theirs is even fuller and richer when it fairly comes. The larch-green has scarcely a rival save the birch in April; the oak has many rivals, and appears to surpass them easily.

This stage, like the larch's, is soon done, and in a week or two the foliage of the oak is so full that we lose sight of what is now a signal charm of the tree —the dark limbs, "elbows" and "knees" in the old Forest and park type of tree, showing clearly among and at the back of the splendid mass of greenest leaf.

The beech is next, no doubt; the ash, which at this time is only beginning to leaf in its meagre way, scarcely counting in this competition of chlorophyl. But the beech is second to none in the faery lightness and delicacy of its leaf, singly or in the mass. Before the foliage hardens and coarsens, it is as if the sun pierced right down through these very soft beech-leaves and shone the other side of them! The beech-leaf is very fresh, only it looks somewhere less of a pigment green than that of the oak. That is the difference in beech and oak. They supply between them the utmost one could wish for of vivid freshness and of airy lightness.

But this effect must pass almost at once: a day and night or two of intense growth, and it is over. Nothing one day in May is as it was yesterday. I noticed that the caterpillar was already at work on

some of the brightest leaves of the oak on the edge of the New Forest—the end being so clear in the beginning!

The sense of perfect newness and freshness felt in any of these ordinary, homely scenes in England is nearly everywhere associated with the sense of great age and centuries of tradition. A village with a name like Hurn must have, of course, some undying tradition. I have forgot, or I never knew, what the story is, though there surely must have been some mighty hunter of that name. But passing Hurn, I reached the great flat meadows of a river, and rested on the bridge, and saw a salmon leap. What a typical South of England scene! One sees hundreds of the kind. Ripple and dark glide of a broad, clear stream, with large, easy curves, hosts of brown and white cattle feeding and splashing at the water's edge, and the summer wagtails, with breasts almost buttercup yellow, flying among them or balancing on the weeds that here and there lie flat on the surface.

It is not a spot that seems to promise much human drama or great tradition. Only one man, a gamekeeper, crossed the bridge during the hour I stayed there, whilst the village across the stream slept securely. But it occurred to me after I had risen and gone on into the country the other side of the stream that this was the Avon between Ringwood and Sopley. The village was Avon, and does not, or did not quite lately, the village smithy which I passed pay a

yearly fine because the knight stopped here to have his horse shoed, flying from the arrow which no pedant or philosopher can withdraw from English history? It has been there since 1100. What a virtue is in that!

Tyrell, or Tirel, forded the stream a little higher up—after the shoes were reversed—and to this day we have a Tyrell Avon. There are hundreds of Tyrell Avons in England. They are worth going to in May.

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It is impossible not to be impressed by the immense body of tradition that is held in these ordinary homely scenes of village life and labour. Here is the real Illustrated History of England. But bound up inextricably and to the end with this natural scene and these thousand years of human story—moving and stately, except to the dolt—is that which we hardly dare name above our breath to-day for fear of giving mortal offence! England in May, the best scenes of it, that perfect disarray and array of wood and meadow and common, and park, sward, and elmy hamlet lane, and endless hedgerows trimmed or straggling—what is it but in the main our English land tradition? I cannot understand the carelessness of men who value these scenes, and yet would do away ruthlessly, utterly, with the scheme from which they came, and through which they continue. To destroy the land tradition must be to destroy that which makes

a day of English countryside at this season a day where Shakespeare's praise still holds good. Seeley, in one of his lectures on the "Expansion of England," made light of the notion that we could whistle off our Colonies and return to the England of Elizabeth —"in a great pool a swan's nest." But the Socialist goes farther: it is not even going to leave us the swan's nest.

CHAPTER X

WHEAT GOLD AND GREEN

AFTER all, there is something in extent and wealth of colour to rival oak-green of May in England, and that is wheat-green. I am not thinking of the vivid, very fresh green of young corn just beginning to hide the ploughland in April and early in May, the green which throws up the great hosts of larks with their myriad music—fine thing, though, that is. I mean the wheat-green or gilt-green of full summer, which in June begins again to rule the English landscape.

It begins to be noticed as one of the chief features of the scene at about the start of harvest, and the English harvest opens with the fall of the first crop of hay and continues till the close of summer. Harvest fills the best part of three months in each year in England, for it includes grass, clovers, beans, peas, barley, oats, and wheat, and is almost continuous from midsummer till far into September.

Wheat may be a thing of stiff and formal growth. At its best it is formal. It gives the idea of weight and solidity. It presents to the eye, when seen in

large tracts, the appearance at a little distance of a dead level floor. The sameness and regularity of wheat goes on growing more and more marked between now and the close of the corn harvest, till there comes a day, in August as a rule, when many a corn-growing district in the South or the Midlands looks as if it were ruled out into figures straight-lined and exact almost as Euclid's.

One appreciates this by going to some fairly high spot near the end of harvest, where the eye can command a large sweep of country yielding mainly corn. Then the neatly dotted shocks and sheaves of cut and bound corn ready to be stacked, and the crops still standing, and the crops which the cutter and binder is at work on—one and all appear in the most precise regularity; dead straight lines as if secured by mathematical measure, dead level floors as if secured by the theodolite!

Moreover, it is not only a case of uniform but of unicolour; the gold yellow and the chocolate brown of the all but ripe and of the quite ripe wheat do not vary over hundreds and thousands of acres of ground in a good corn year.

It is really hard to overstate the orderly appearance of these wheat scenes viewed from a hill a mile or so away. All that disarray and medley of hedgerow and lane and spinney, which make so many idylls, are wanting in the wheat scene. And yet the wheat-fields, from early July right on through the harvest,

are a noble feature of the English landscape. They cannot be too heavy-looking, too level, too orderly, too ruled out, too one-coloured. The more these features prevail in wheatfields, the nobler the crop and the promise of corn. This is one of the cases, if one of the few, in Nature under man where there can be no clash between use and beauty. The more of one, the more of the other; the loss of one, the loss to the other—such is the rule of the wheatfield.

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I confess to small patience with the school that would take wheat in England out of the grand competition of the soil. There may be a little sentiment in my belief in wheatfields. The wheatfield is one of the oldest and most lasting and signal things in the history of the land in England. It has seen the best part of the oak itself out. It has seen ten centuries out, and it still waves gilt-green over large English spaces. That is a thing which offers excuse for a little sentiment.

But one believes in the wheatfield besides, for very different reasons. People who have lived on the land, and been in close touch with those who work it, do absolutely know that wheat has been, is, and must be one of the staple and standard crops throughout large tracts of England. "The old corn of the land" is still good to grow and to eat. That talk of changing corn for cabbages all over our England—it is a theory too thin to grow anything in the end but thistles. It

can never be. All our markets and our manners are against it.

To do away with these wheatfields as a main feature of the soil we must do away with a great deal more than the English land system. We must change the habits of the people, the channels of collection and distribution. We must change even the nature of a great deal of the soil itself.

It could only be done, if ever it were done, by the laws of evolution; no mere revolution can long lay down in cabbage that which Nature means for corn.

Belief in wheat—its glory as a great feature of landscape and as a maker of manhood—implies no distrust of small men in land. It is the last thing it implies with me. Since I have thought at all about that supreme English problem, the land, I have felt that the small man, where he can make his way, should surely be a large part of the solution. Many of the crops thrive with him. The harder moral qualities are found in the successful small man in land—grit and thrift and the love and pride of standing alone, instead of being propped up by others. I never met a small man in land who did not in somewise illustrate these hard-shell virtues. Idealists need not think this makes the small independent holder fit only for the methods of Gradgrind in Coketown. We may be sure he can have another side to life like others who work hard and make a livelihood. The successful small man

in land to-day is probably very much like the old English yeoman. For one thing, he is a patriot absolutely.

The ill of this class is its smallness. Where we have half a dozen of these men in a village we want a score. As to ownership, it is a great question. I was not altogether in favour of ownership a few years ago, but I have come round to feel it is the only plan worth having if the new class of small man is to last on the land. If he is worth growing at all, he should be grown not as an annual, but as a perennial. I do not know that ownership is "magic." Magic deals in dark arts. For a man to own the bit of ground he digs and sows and gives his life to means no magic; it is all in the light of Nature—a perfectly simple plan, all above-board.

I leant at first to the idea of hiring out the land to him, because I dreaded an inrush of small men who have no land virtue and have never been really *soiled*. Moreover, to set up the man as owner cannot get such a good result as for the man to set himself up. But the best plan, I feel now, would be to choose out by a close scrutiny the likeliest of the small men who apply for the land and set them up to work out their ownership. It is State-aid to secure self-aid, and the union of the opposites seems hard. But the best of the men who go on this crutch will, year by year, step by step, lean less on it. In the end they put it aside altogether.

The prize should be property. I cannot take gravely the story that men who keenly want the land in small parcels, and are fit to work it, do not want to own the land. They would settle on the soil, they would work it, but they would not own it! The thing reads like some irony on human nature. Now, the small men in land I have known see the thing in quite another light, the light of "The Northern Farmer, New Style"—

"Proputty, proputty's ivrything 'ere, an', Sammy, I'm blest
If it isn't the saäme oop yonder, fur them as 'as it's the best."

How is the man not fit to own or afraid to own the strip of land he works at all his life, fit to hire it? I object to have him as a tenant, and under this hiring plan I am perhaps as a ratepayer already a landlord! A man with this mouse-heart is not fit to hire or hold. But this is not the true small holder. He wants, of course, above all to hold.

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The cornfields must continue, and if ever again the value of the grain sinks so low that we cannot grow it on English soil save at a loss, the worse for England. There is national character in what a country has grown hard for a thousand years. Continuity in corn, like continuity in Constitution, is a thing of worth. It is a kind of national goodwill. But with the wheatfields and greater pastures and greater

flocks there is room for small men in every parish. It is variety of holder we want on our soil. Monotony in a land where conditions widely differ, often in the same district and even parish, means decay. Variety is evolution's way. It means energy, constant advance. Variety is at the root of life.

CHAPTER XI

THE LONG JUNE DAY

WHAT is the great thing about June in England as we touch the zenith of the year? I take it to be the splendid length of the day. This is the time when some of us can almost get our right share, full measure, of open life, instead of those mere snatches of it which is the usual allowance at other seasons. Full measure, I reckon, is eight to nine good hours spent without the least break, supremely free from custom and interference, in absolute country. If we are to realize the truth of John of Gaunt's eulogy of England, we must get our full measure of the thing at this season.

But I question much whether the effect of a single day like this of eight to nine hours, even with weather and scene kind in every way, is enough, unless it falls to the lot of one who is already elate or fairly keen, and in almost perfect health and heart. The man who is jaded at all or overstrained wants an allowance of quite two or three continuous days in the open each day, yielding this eight to nine hour measure. I put it from personal and repeated experience at three days. Then what is talked and written of to-day as

"the open-air cure" does truly begin to work on nerve and brain. Continuity is of the essence of it; and, largely because this is often overlooked, the good of the thing is soon spent, or indeed never realized, by many people.

My idea of this open-air redress or restorative is quite another thing from the doctor's ordinary prescription or routine, though that may be in some cases—perhaps in many thousands—excellent in its way. I am not thinking at all of the habit of taking a moderate amount of regular exercise out of doors every day; of sitting in the sun; of sleeping on the veranda or in a hammock slung under garden trees. This habit may often bring or keep health. But it is a wholly different matter from what I have in mind. Convention and interruption and restraint cannot be quite put away by such habits of health as these.

The open-air recipe I should advise does not at all demand that we should sleep out of doors, or breakfast and sup there. It only insists that during the greater part of the daylight for three long days running we shall put ourselves deep in fields, downs, or woods at a secure distance from the ordinary scenes and routine of our life. One meal, it is true, must be made out of doors if this plan is followed—the light midday meal; but there is no reason why the other two should not be taken in comfort indoors, at an inn or at any other quarters it may be well to choose. I only desire to escape custom or convention so far

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as it breaks in on my seven or eight to ten o'clock day given up absolutely to the influence of Nature and the open air in the best and longest-lit time of year.

To shun convention or custom to this end is no cult of the open or of the so-called simple life, which strikes one as a false thing. A few years ago a painted and important-looking imitation of a gipsy cart took up its station in a lane near a village where I was living. One who lived in the place, hearing the name of the owners, and recognizing it well, was shocked to think of the discomfort they must be enduring. He wrote begging them to make free of his house and table. But the owners, much ruffled, gave him to understand very clearly that for the present they were strangers to him; they were living, it appeared, by a rather complicated plan, the simple life.

Now, that was not the cure of the open, but the cult of it. What real value can there be in a gipsy cart, I wonder, or in a gipsy kettle, save to gipsies?

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June, with anything like the kind of air and sky we naturally look for about midsummer, is the kindest month for our three long days given up to open air, free from the fret and strain of life. Nature in England has by mid-June lost the wonderful radiancy of green which is the feature of mid and later May. But the light is longer—that is the chief advantage of June; and then, though the leaf has spent its

freshness, it has as recompense that fulness which is never seen or felt in spring.

There is a sense of something immensely solid and satisfying about Nature in the English June. Every foot of ground in coppices and streamsides and hedgerows and roadsides off the main ways is packed and pressed with green. Every nook and cranny is peopled by teeming plant-life. Nothing of the kind is felt in spring. Spring in England promises, summer performs; and June, at its zenith, is more summer than any month in the year.

At the close of the third long day at this time given up to Nature without hindrance or break one has a sense of having received some solid and satisfying gift through the earth. I have felt this, and it seems to be in the nature of a physical even more than of a spiritual gift. After all, June, in the weight and vastness of its green and the richness of its life, is nothing if not material. It is not easy to take June in England to-day quite spiritually; I must accept it in a large degree sensuously.

June, then, being the best month of all—though far from the only month—in which to exchange ordinary life, whether town or country life, for our three long days in the open, the question is: By what means shall we withdraw ourselves from routine? The gipsy cart and kettle would be too complicated a business, even granting it were not a cult. Nor, to turn to something ludicrously its opposite—and to

what is anything on earth but a cult—does a motor promise at all well. I am sure that petrol is not the right motive power to this end. Least of all would one choose to buzz along by motor-cycle a hundred miles a day. I hope I know better than to disparage motor-cycles; I rode—once—on one of the first brought to England. Perhaps one may suggest a single little drawback—the rider after a long spin through dust sometimes comes off looking like Jacques when he dropped from the back springs of Monseigneur the Marquis's great carriage in "A Tale of Two Cities." But anyhow, the motor-cycle is not fit for our purpose—its mechanism should not be spoilt by rude roads in deep country-side.

My own plan is often to hire an old cycle with a very low gear, which takes me deep into the country and leaves me there. Afterwards, I can wander as I choose by the stream, or in the woods, or among the tracks that wind through the great thymy chalk downs. Probably the most human plan is to go all the way on foot after we have left the town or village railway-station, or go on horseback. I think the way of the horse, indeed, may be best of all. It is little used now for holiday, but wise generations will surely come back to the saddle and bridle. There was a dignity and ease, a habit of health and serenity, in horseback England which we are wanting to-day. A good horse means freedom and firm independence.

The horse, too, can carry us quite far enough afield and off the beaten way.

However, the great business is not how we go; it is not where we go, if only the spot chosen by chance or deliberation is real countryside teeming with the boundless green life of June. The great business is to give oneself enough time there to get thoroughly saturated and steeped in the power of the season. Three days in the open will not cure the ills of life, though we repeat them every month of the year; but the influence of green earth and running water and large expanses of sky, when for a time we give ourselves up wholly to them, is great.

CHAPTER XII

THE LONG JUNE EVE

FOR a sense of Nature magic I know nothing in England to surpass the long, light calm of the midsummer evenings. They seem to be all witchery. To get the full effect of the thing a sure plan is to come out of the town in the late afternoon and start walking home from the railway-station a few minutes after sundown—between eight and nine now. One takes the footpath. It leads across grass and wheatlands, through hazel and oak coppices into the Sussex dell, and up again out of that steep dark place to the light hayfields on the uplands beyond. This is not a hard plan, because England is fairly wound about by footpaths of the kind—they are one of its modest glories. Some of them may be marked by dotted lines on Ordnance maps, and many of the longest and most winding and overgrown lead back almost to the beginning of the land system. But the map is not a good way to learn their courses. One knows them best, no doubt, by that priceless thing, old association; one knows them all the more by going wrong once or twice, and straying to farmhouses and gates and fences which are another side to the system.

Nothing very fearful happens if one does stray to that other side. What is there of fear in the tread of the carter or the keeper coming home late to supper? He puts us back on the dotted lines by a word or two, and his "good-night" has some ring of human brotherhood at such a time and place.

There nearly always are evenings at the zenith of the year when, for half an hour or so after the sun is well down, the state of light appears to be unchanging. At half-past eight it seemed not a degree lighter that it became at ten minutes to nine—that was my experience on one of these evenings in June. At ten minutes to nine, at nine, at a quarter past nine—I like to time it to the minute!—nothing was easier in the open, three and four hundred feet above the sea, than to discriminate nicely between the varying shades of green, those of the wheat, the oaks, the brake-fern at its full foliage, and the brake fern not yet quite uncrumpled at the tips; and, at the latest time of these three times, when a female ghost moth dropped to rest on a grass stem under an oak—even there, looking close, one might trace something of the eccentric device on her brown upper wing.

I do not know at what time before ten the monochrome absolute began, but I know that when I came out of the deep Sussex dell at the end of the footpath on that haunted, God-lit night and went indoors, the world was still green, though a few minutes later a clock chimed the half-hour.

During this deep trance, between sundown and the verge of night, the light, I am clear, is of a peculiar quality. It is not like the wan light of earliest dawn, it is not the soft evening dusk we know so well in England. A certain ethereal lustre seems to shine through all space: it may remind one, if faintly, of the close of the Desert day when the chill follows blazing heat and the light is suddenly plunged into dark with scarcely any penumbra between the two.

But the state of the air on these few wondrous, drawn-out midsummer evenings cannot be truly expressed through words any more than through colour and canvas. There is no language for light. Its appearances are infinitely too illusive to catch and confine in terms of speech; we see them, and, far more, we *feel* them, that is all.

The lull, which grows and grows through this rapt and radiant hour or so, seems to be inseparable from the state of light—at least, we cannot at this time have one without the other. Certain sounds in the deep hush of the evening or night, at any season, do accentuate silence—this is common knowledge to those who have lived or spent much time in large woods or on lonely downs, and waste places. But on such an evening the emphasis is not needed. It was not given. The thrush ended between eight and nine, before his usual time, and it was not much before half past nine that I heard the nightjar—I thought it must be over bright for him before then.

CHAPTER XIII

IMMEMORIAL LANES

THE Italians have a name for summer which sounded to me very happy when I first heard it. Summer is "estate" in Italian, and I was half cheated into thinking it akin with our word! No doubt the Italian word is one with the Latin, meaning heat, and has nothing whatever to do with ours; yet the summer perfected, the second part of it, might fairly be described as "estate" in the English meaning of the term without much forcing of fancy. There is a sense of material possession, and the leisurely enjoying of it, felt at this time and scarcely known at another. There is now, too, that other strong sense of rest after rush which, I think, is always felt in July in deep English country.

That tremendous energy of creation which we are continuously alive to through later spring, and right on till midsummer, seems to come to an abrupt stop. It is an illusion, of course, a viewing of Nature through subjective eyes. There can no more be a dead point in the progress of green life than in the orbit of a star. Under the surface of things the work of making —and of unmaking—goes on without the least pause

in every field and hedge and wood. The hand of the clock never stays an instant in the great business of the green world; God's business in which things are perpetually being built up to be broken down, and re-broken to be rebuilt. The business is just as unpausing and sleepless in July as in the sappiest hours of the year. But one is quite unconscious of it, and every season my impression grows, if anything, stronger that some day or week in June simply cuts the summer in two parts, the character of the first being pressure and of the second pause.

It is the second part which the description seems to fit. It is estate. The thing is fulfilled. The season stands.

I could not name a place where one is more conscious of this apparent end of one stage in the summer and beginning of the other than an old English wood-lane. I suppose these wood-lanes are peculiar to England. I have seen nothing remotely like them abroad. At least, from what I have seen of those countries, I should say the thing is impossible in Italy or France or Switzerland. France surpasses us utterly in compact and complete little farms and homesteads exquisite in detail. France is mosaic of them in many places. Switzerland has those Alpine pastures which we could not imitate in the least if we would. But as in the footpath, so in the lane and lane-end, in the spinney and the tiny hamlet green and the great hedgerow—we beat them all.

I went up such a wood-lane one day in July, and July is the month for the wood-lanes. This one is almost a mile long. It winds and winds with the careless, beautiful curve of the wood, and it has a hedgerow on the opposite side to the wood which has got quite beyond the control of the hedger with his small billhook and long slasher. It is ten, fifteen feet high in spots, and some of the hedge timber—"hedge trumpery" Evelyn called it—maples and ash stems that are ash-trees almost, look fit for a saw-pit. This wood-lane hedgerow has an immense tangle of wild clematis, or traveller's joy, the nesting-place of parties or small flocks of late green-finches.

Such hedgerows, through much of the homely landscape of south-western shires, are nearly always bound and smothered by clematis. It has so grown into and arched over the lane in one or two spots that it has there become a spinney instead of hedgerow. No interest is hurt by the hedgerow encroaching on the lane. A timber-cart goes up the lane now and then, whilst perhaps the wain is sometimes seen at hay harvest—there is room for them in spite of clematis. The wood-lane is really little more than a footway or bridle-path, and it has been so for two or three generations.

As to the origin of the wood-lane, it is manorial and immemorial—that is about all I care to know of it. Manorial, for men beat the bounds along or close beside it within the memory of the oldest folk about;

immemorial, for it goes right back—judging by its local name—into the dim beginnings of English history. It may be earlier even than the history of England, for it has a bit of Rome in its full name. It recalls Clough's poem, "Whence comest thou, shady lane?"

Now, this is a typical feature of England, southern England. Lanes, hedged and overgrown like it, winding round the woods and losing themselves in remote fields and downs in just the same way, and like it, manorial and immemorial, are threaded through the country. They are among the best spots on earth to go to in July. One scarcely misses the freshness of the year, the compensation in its fulness being here so noble. The song these wood-lanes were brimming with earlier gives place to a gracious quiet—after that concert deep calm.

Like the footpath, the green lane came through, and exists through, the historic land tradition of England. Is it well to keep these places unspoilt in the form they have come down to us through Tudor, Norman, and Saxon? I think that it is, and that only a vandal would deny the value of that wood-lane, though scarcely a waggon in a month goes along it.

He is a barbarian probably to deny it. But he is a blockhead certainly if he thinks to keep this good thing and destroy the system through which it exists. Might he not as well propose to keep intact the pigments of a work in the National Gallery and throw away the canvas?

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CHAPTER XIV

MIRAGE OF AN ENGLISH AUTUMN

THE lighting power of leaves is a strange and splendid feature of autumn in England. It is very marked some years. I have often been struck by it in the Brickhill Woods of Buckinghamshire, when the brake-fern, after its manner in shaded and sheltered spots, turns pale yellow in the glades, unspotted and unstained as yet by the least tinct of brown. On a sunless day the fern's yellow at a little distance is like mild sunlight streaming through the trees. But there are places and states of light in which you can have exactly the same effect in the open, though the October sky is blank from zenith to horizon with uniform grey cloud. Streaks of pure pale yellow, of much the same shade as the brake-fern's, lying across the fading green of elm-trees, will make an illusion of sunshine. The illusion is so complete on a day when now and then the sun does gleam through the grey cloud that we may be deceived by it, though even on our guard.

At such times we may have to glance up at the sky to see whether the sun is actually shining or not before we can be satisfied that the yellow light is the

elm's or the sun's. It recalls mirages I have seen in the Sahara, where the eye is constantly too much for the understanding. The brake-fern and the elm, I think, are the chief makers of this mirage of English woods and fields in October, but the lighting power of blanched and fading leaf is general in many places even where the fern and elm are absent. I have seen the splendid Brickhill Woods, despite an overcast grey sky, steeped in light, though not in that look of actual sunshine.

Other woods at this time make light by the same means. All that is needed for the mirage of autumn is that a great abundance of leaves should have turned, not red or pink or brown, but pale and pure yellow.

The larger the leaf the more its light-making gift on a subdued October day. The Brickhill Woods are largely woods of Spanish chestnuts, whose leaves, where sheltered and well inside the wood, often turn pure yellow before falling, like those of the horse-chestnut. They light the wood powerfully.

But chestnuts are not the only leaves that make the illusion of light. Most trees and underwoods that grow in England, and cast their leaf at this time, have it in some degree. I have seen the effect in woods where there are neither Spanish nor horse-chestnuts, but a careless, excellent mingling of hazel, oak, maple, birch, wild cherry, beech, and various lesser contributors of autumn colour as cornel or dog-wood, white-beam, wayfaring-tree, ash, poplar, and the round-

leaved sallow. No matter how dull the day, we have in this October scene an impression of lightness and brightness, and here and there of mild sunshine, though the whole sky is wrapped in a heavy pall. It is the "mock sunshine of the faded woods." The thing is strange and beautiful. When it is at its height, the usual idea of death and decay in autumn is banished from the mind. There is no sense of depression about the lit wood, even though the air is dead still and steeped in autumn *must*, and the gauzy veils and stratus or earth clouds lie about the woods and commons.

Just before the turn of the leaf, and at the first hint of turning, there is often something lowering about the scene. Everything appears to be worn down—the immense vital force and flow of spring and full summer come to nothing—and wherever we look is sign of something miserable and shabby and smudged and finished with.

The last state of the green—oak, elm, beech, whatever it be—is the most dismal in an English year. It is not the Fall of the year that at times is so terrible; it is the stage just before the Fall. But the leaf turns, and in a week or two the whole scene is transfigured. The work of sap running down seems to the eye more magical in speed than of sap ascending. It can light the wood in a fortnight; it took longer than this to kindle the same wood in spring.

Light, rather than fire, is, on the whole, the image

that expresses the autumn in ordinary and wild English woods and coppices. The idea of fire is conveyed better in spring, when the live tips of the twigs appear to burn just before they break into leaf and life. There may be a suggestion of fire in autumn woods; but, except on the outsides of great masses of beech-trees it is seen only in dabs or patches here and there. In the oak, birch, and hazel woods of the South of England and the Midlands there is a look of light in October rather than of fire. Fire is a figure of speech for autumn in England that has been slightly overdone by the poets and the prose writers alike.

A striking thing about the spectacle of these English woods of oak and mixed underwoods at this time is the way it is produced by two quiet colours. The variety of tone and tint seems to be almost without end, but look into the thing and you find that mainly it is made by the blending of a pale yellow and a warm brown. The high colours in the leaf are in a very small minority. There are some vivid and biting reds in bramble-leaves and a few other undergrowth plants in the wood; and there are more sullen reds and purples than there are pinks in cornel, and spindlewood, and in wayfaring and wild guelder rose-trees, and in the wild cherry or geantree, whilst here and there a maple "burns itself away." But these are trifling contributors of colour. The vast bulk of the colour in the autumn wood at the middle of October is made up of the plain yellow

and even plainer brown leaf, the brake-fern and hazel and oak and beech—for really the beech turns for the most part brown, not red, at the Fall. The brown dominates. The subdued far exceeds the sanguine.

Out of brown and yellow, plain and unmistakable to every eye not colour-blind, Nature works up the great scene of October in England. The medium is the atmosphere, which is never so favourable to the making and mingling of curious and subtle dyes as it is in autumn. The process is seen all through the day. It often begins in the fresh of morning, when the sun is shining into the fine veils that are lifting and dispersing, and, as they lift, the new-ploughed land sometimes appears to be shot over with an iridescent bloom of purple.

It goes on through the afternoon and when the sun is quite obscured ; and I think that as October advances, and the oaks lose the last of their green and grow browner and browner, the flushes and dyes on the surface of the woods seen at a little distance grow in number and subtlety till a hard frost or heavy rain brings it to an end, and completes the Fall of the year.

The expression "autumn tints" has come to be suspected. It is grown maudlin. A thing believed to be gush is associated with it. And no doubt there has been a certain amount of gush about it. It often took the harmless form of album verses a generation or two since. The fault arose because people did not go

out enough into fields and woods and forget themselves in the natural scene. The best preventive against gush about autumn is an intimacy with these immense scenes of light and colour; going out into the open and being saturated with them. There is the true antiseptic against any tendency to false sentiment.

But may not the intimacy with the real thing in Nature do a great deal more than save people from false sentiment about such scenes? It can act apparently as a safe guide and as a corrective in many questions of art and even literature. There are mirages in art and literature—art and literature are at times full of them—and we want not to be deceived by them.

The frequent puzzle among many people is how to distinguish the true from the false in books and in paintings and in sculpture and in architecture and in every branch of art. Often the puzzle grows still harder—how to know the difference between the best and what looks the best; how, for example, to distinguish in letters and art between style and stylishness, the pretender and the performer, paste and diamond. It seems as if the best training for such matters should be training in the schools that profess them. The theory of the thing is good, but the practice of it is always failing. The truth seems to be this—there is too much attention to artifice, too little grounding in Nature. Intimacy with Nature is being

in close touch with what is actual and essential; dealing not with figments so much as with facts. It is being in constant touch with the real, and at the root of all that is fine and true in books and in paintings and stonework is the great element of reality. That is why the surest way to good taste in these things is intimacy with Nature. All the teaching and theory and study in the world will not do where that is wanting.

PHASE TWO

ENGLISH WORTHIES

CHAPTER I

THE HURDLER

IS not the ideal open air life the life of the hurdler in the coppices of England? There is a time of year when he works in perfect conditions: the time when oaks have just gone down among the felled underwood and the bark-stripper is at work. The two or three weeks that are spent in barking the oaks are often the loveliest, though far from the richest, in the wood year. Walking in the coppices then we find everything so good. The sound of the stripping is good to the ear; I half believe there is an intrinsic melody, a music in such sound apart even from the charm of its environment and association. Who that has split ash-wood logs with a wedge and boidel has not rejoiced in the sound of the splitting? The saw can offend, at least be uninteresting and monotonous, not so the boidel; and it is with the tools of the bark-stripper as with the tools of the wood-splitter—the note pleases in itself.

As to the scent of the wet, intensely live oaks in these bark-stripping days, there is not the faintest doubt about this being good. The wood is a world of scent varying almost from week to week as the season

waxes and wanes, certainly varying from month to month. Everyone who knows well the wood atmosphere in England knows it to be full of peculiar essences, fragrances, some strong, others delicate, and nearly all good to our sense. I except the smell which on a rare scenting day a fox, crossing the ride during a pheasant shoot, leaves on a moist air—though some may find this sweetest of all—and I except the scent of a few disgraceful toadstools which in decay *melt* at a damp wood corner. The smell of bracken at full foliage, the smell in May of young hazel underwood leaves after showers, the smell of ground-ash roots (and of other underwood roots), above all that indescribable and untraceable smell of the wood as a whole in soppy, sappy hours—all are very good to the sense.

Fields and downs, with many a merit that the wood has not, cannot surpass the wood in myrrh.

The scent of oak and hazel where the wattle hurdler works from dawn till dusk seems something more than a scent. Is it not as an aura? The best of it is at about stripping time; but, save for a few wilted weeks late in summer, the wattle hurdler's wood is fragrant through the year. On a clean morning in October a hurdler works in conditions that are far above those of most of the world's toilers in country or in town.

The wattle hurdler can be at work in the wood for his five or six days a week throughout the year. He

THE MOST ENGLISH SCENE OF ALL.

is not actually at the frame all this time. Many weeks must be spent in cutting the ripe hazel, ash, or oak underwood, and laying it in lans or rows. Some of this cut wood is fit only for bavins or faggots, but the best is chosen for the upright stakes—ten to each hurdle—and for the athwarts wattled in and out of the uprights. People who think hurdling needs no headwork should watch the man not only at his frame, but picking out of the lans those rods fit for wattling. How delicate and how firm and strong is the work at the curved frame! Each wand or rod twisted and pressed down between the uprights must be neatly split or trimmed ere it is set in its place. Hand, knee, and eye are active partners in the making of that beautiful thing, the English sheep-hurdle. The hand may be chief partner, but there is headwork if in any form of physical labour under the sun.

Last, when the wattling is done and the hurdle prised up out of its frame, laid on the ground, and straightened by a firm tread or two of the foot, I like to see those refining touches with the little axe that pares off the rough ends. It is the artistry of the hurdler. Whoever saw a stroke of it go wrong when a crack hand is making hurdles? A bungler might miss his aim, and so mar an hour's work, but the quick, true hand and eye of the hurdler never missed.

So the hurdle is off the frame, carried away a few yards from the shelter, and laid level on the perfectly even pile which has been growing very slowly,

steadily growing for months past, till it stands for perhaps half a year's work in the coppice. Measured in money that hurdle represents fourpence to the maker. "So much for the ideal life!" a scoffer or a striker may exclaim in his haste. But the profit, the value to the maker of such work, cannot only be measured in mere money; it is a child's mistake to suppose they can; indeed, it is far worse than a child's mistake, for a child, watching with wonder the hurdle grow, knows nothing of the money side of the account, yet knows the beauty and delight of the work. Each bit of work finely wrought and ended is in some measure its own wage to the maker. I admit the lowness of the money profit to the woodman. I may deplore it. But watching such work as this, done in the best spots in the world, in the best conditions for hardihood and health, I can easily understand that the main prize is not all in pence. There is a great deal of truth in that old tag about labouring being praying. Are there not forms of work that are prayer in practice?

I long thought that the largest number made by one man in a day was twelve, roughly a hurdle an hour in a long summer day, allowing about two hours for food. A great feat even among the best men, heroes of the hurdle! It needs an eager worker in the full joy and power of life. But I find I have a record of a man who made sixteen hurdles in a day, though here all the uprights must have been trimmed and

ready at hand by the frame, and the hazel stems split and pared for the wattling. I suppose no worker ever kept up this pace for more than a day or two at a stretch. Nor could any man turn out the perfect hurdle working at such pressure. The difference between the perfect hurdle of the master hand and the hurdle of the average hand, or of the very quick hand in the copse, can only be detected by the most trained eye, but it must tell in the end. The difference is not only in beauty of workmanship, in the look of the thing. Fine finish tells in the life of a sheep-hurdle.

Each hurdle of the master hand has a better life by a small fraction than one made by the man who, I do not say scamps, but hastes through with his work; and these small fractions must form together a whole that really means something to a sheep farmer who buys a pile of hurdles in the copse ten feet high, four to each layer. But in the press of life and the market—even in the remote and quiet spots where nothing ever seems to press, the places where wattle hurdling is still a steady trade—I doubt whether there is any money equivalent for such fractions of excellence. The return can only be in reputation and in self-respect.

The wattle sheep-hurdle has not been improved away like some things our forefathers knew as simple necessities of a farming life—the reaping-hook, the flail, the scythe, for example. (Imagine country folk

in the fifties, or even in the sixties, asked to believe that the scythe would go out before the century turned—one might as well have asked a seaman to believe that the days of the sail were numbered!) The wattle sheep-hurdle has not even been improved on. It is what it was when our fathers bird-nested in the hazel copse. The curved frame is, I doubt not, exactly the same. The hurdle itself has the same number of uprights; it is the same height, the same length, made of the same underwoods—nay, the underwoods, I dare say, cut often from the same stubs or plants to-day that they were cut from before we were born. Many a good hazel-plant was throwing up its clean, straight shoots fifty years or more ago, and will throw them up strong long after we have gone. Underwoods outlast those who fell them. They outlast the oldest worker in the wood, though at eighty he is not too stiff and rheumy to work slowly at the frame even a few hours in open weather.

The truth about the sheep-hurdle is that it is not only good to the eye when fresh from the frame and flashing white in the sun, clearly seen on its pile two or three hundred yards away through the copse; it is what the scythe (bearing in mind English weather) never really was—completely efficient. Wattle hurdles have not gone out simply because, for the control and feeding of sheep in the roots or in the sainfoin or the grass-lands, there is nothing to surpass these hurdles. To appreciate this you have only to watch

the under shepherd at work—hard work in truth on ground frozen in winter or baked by a summer drought—fixing the pen for the coming night and morrow.

Barbed wire and that other terrible wire threaded through iron stakes never served a shepherd. Wire has its wicked way in many walks of life, barbed and netted and tanging, but no wire can supplant the good withy on an English sheep-walk.

The wattle hurdle is the right height, the right length, the right weight for its purpose. Here at least the hand is greater than the machine which has ousted it in sowing, in cutting, in binding, in threshing, and even—in the greater fields and farms—in ploughing. This hurdle remains one of the very few necessaries of field work in England to-day that are wholly hand-made. It is old style, yet it is style absolutely competent. I never myself knew of a really good wattle hurdler who was a bad man. Such a character or contradiction is probably rare. Environment tells so much in the making of men, and this hard work and life in the copse, all seasons and weathers from boyhood up, mean about the soundest and purest environment on earth.

CHAPTER II

TARPAULIN

IT is hard to understand the temperament of people who say they would not care to live their lives again. Yet some hold this opinion in all sincerity. A friend, with whom I was talking over past angling days on a famous Derbyshire trout stream, entered into the enthusiasm of the thing, and agreed those were great times when at the height of the Mayfly season we did not always sit down to eight o'clock dinner at the angling inn till half-past ten. Yet, he added, there had been on the whole too much ill with the good—he would not wish to live his life again. But who would not live childhood over again after childhood has become part of the enchanted, infinitely remote world of dreams that appeared once to be real? It would be worth while—a hundred times worth while—to put up with a repetition of the rest of life, with all its failures and forfeits, if we could get back into the castle of childhood, with its divine pains and joys. Unbreachable the fort of the world looked to Arnold in later life, the walls that sanguine youth once thought to scale showing higher and higher. If one could get back and make a breach in

that earlier, securer, and more beautiful castle in the past, it would not much matter about the one in front of us—probably a lying one—that recedes and recedes like an autumn mist as we advance towards it.

The adventures one had in that great castle of youth were so much more exciting—the escapes so much more hairbreadth than any that befel one after. The people there were surely beyond measure more entertaining than people later. There never were such gamekeepers, such gardeners' boys (with single-barrelled, long, crooked Brummagem muzzle-loaders to shoot at the jays), such birdnesting cowboys on the freeholders' common.

Above all, there never have been such adventurous drives home as there were then in the carrier's cart from the market town five or seven miles away. It might be worth getting back to childhood just to know to the full once more the joy of the carrier's cart. Happily, Careful the carrier himself and the cart still are. Light railways—with lighter dividends—have opened up parts of aloof England which were once served only by the carrier; but the lightest of them do not go up and down the steep hills and along the byroads between the small market towns of our south-country shires and the lonely villages of Domesday, the kind of villages that begin in ash, shaw, oak, and end in combe, bourne, holt—names that murmur in the ear with how rare a charm for many of us!

Steep hills are almost essential to carriers. There is the hero of the hurdle, the hero of the hayfield, the hero of the hoe, on the roll of the hard workers. The carrier is hero of the hill. A carrier confined to the flat, to my mind, does not count. I was reared in a land of hills, where carriers *were* carriers, and are so to-day ; where carriers were and are a necessity of life, an institution.

The old order may be passing from our country life, the ruling classes ceasing to rule ; the old cottage, the old courtesy, the old language, rich in pure Anglo-Saxon—going with the scythe, the thatched barn, the squire, the manor courts, the sporting farmer. The carrier continues. In truth, there seems to be something elemental about Careful the carrier—about his horse, his cart, his tarpaulin.

What *did* carriers do before tarpaulin was discovered ? The imagination boggles at the idea of a village carrier's cart in the ham, bourne, ash part of England covered with anything but an old, battered tarpaulin. These tarpaulins must have come rather worn from the hands of the maker, a little of the tar in places off the paulin at the very start.

No one who has lived in a carrier's-cart part of England could doubt for a moment about the carrier being one of the hard workers. It is not that even, ceaseless pulse of labour, manual labour, that the woodman and the farm-worker are born to: the labour that exhibits stooping slowness as a figure of

nobility—seeing that such slowness simply means endurance. It is another sort of toil. Yet into that series of peasant figures which Millet painted, how finely would a picture of Careful the carrier have fitted—his horse all angle and bone, his lumbering cart with its shabby cover rocking along the ancient remote roads of the absolute countryside! The picture should have been set in a monochrome, the mean cart with the coarse figures of its passengers up to their eyes in thick gossip, half lit by the single poor lamp. I cannot recall seeing a true carrier's cart in true countryside with more than its one lamp fixed on the right of the cart. It is not many years since I hired that single lanthorn for a shilling and left the carrier in the dark. We were driving home on a late summer evening from a bourne to an oak village, a road mostly all hill and hollow, when dark overtook and found us without a light. In old days, when the hill at its steepest was loose flints and the traffic all horse-drawn, a light may have been almost a luxury on some of the branch roads; to-day it may be life. But the carrier felt his way back in the half dark. The shilling meant two fares and no extra load; it is not every evening the carrier picks up in the last mile or so two passengers like that.

The hard work of the carrier, then, is not of quite the same kind as the hard work of the hoer or hurdler. Instead of making himself to move all day, his work during much of the day is making his beast

to move. Let no one who has not striven often with a beast without a mouth belittle this job. There is need, too, of constant attention to the machine in all weathers, in all states of road. There is the great hill to be faced twice a day, once up, once down, the drag being put on at the dip. We were between six and seven hundred feet high, at the point where the carrier towards the journey's end gets out of the cart for the third or fourth time that afternoon, fixes the chained drag on the back wheel, and lights the tallow candle in his old lanthorn—that, like his tarpaulin, was never known to be new. By the time we have swung and rocked to the foot of that hill we shall be scarcely three hundred feet, in another air, another world.

England is divided up not by district or country council boundaries, or into manors—these last have gone, or are going, and the others will not last, being mere paper or Parliament-made things that do not wear. Men never divided up England. It is divided still in Anglo-Saxon, carrier countryside, as it was, by hills. The folk who live in the village at the foot of the hill are often separated from the folk who live a mile or two away at the top, on the road to the market town, by a very clearly defined boundary. To the folk above, the folk below belong to "the end of the world." How often I have heard that term used by folk above! True, there are towns beyond the village in the hollow, hundreds of miles of them according to the map, but in practice such

towns do not count, being out of range. The carrier puts the otherwise benighted inhabitants of world's end in touch with society as it exists at the top of the hill, and in polite villages and hamlets that lie about the town, enlightened villages near the hub of things.

The bicycle did not shift the boundary; the motor no more effects it than an airship. Instal wireless telegraphy at the village post-office; but the hill still stands, and on it the carrier's cart. Electricity, rubber, petrol—one may imagine Domesday England, holt and bourne and ash England, watching these things or their effects pass as the East watched the thundering legions of the West, then turning to itself again unmoved. The people from the hamlet and the hollow will still go to market in the carrier's cart.

The carrier deals in parcels and in persons. Roughly, the rate stands at sixpence a head for the human package. I knew of an instance years ago where the package was a French tutor who weighed twenty stone. The *entente* being not at all cordial in those days, this man was a butt for country wit, which can be direct and brutal in old-world England. The village laundress proposed to charge double for Monsieur's white waistcoats—a sort of blackmail that set the neighbourhood in guffaws. I cannot remember actually seeing the poor tutor in the carrier's cart, but can imagine that when he sat down the others on the bench may have been prised upward. He was always charged a shilling for a sixpenny drive.

CHAPTER III

FLINT

WHAT a mistake it is to imagine that, save for the South Pole or Siberia, the world has been now fully discovered, and that the days for adventure by land have passed! In spite of the guide-books and place-books, Ordnance maps, in spite of Kelly himself —who on the face of it may seem the last word in the line of discovery—England is still in certain spots an unknown land. Maps are fascinating to pore over for an hour and more on an autumn or winter night; but a copy of "Kelly" can hold one entranced for a whole evening. I suppose "Kellies," had they been printed in his time, would have come under the ban of Charles Lamb as false books, things parading themselves in book's clothing; but I find "Kelly" at times fuller of poetry than Keats. Spending the night at some country inn, I have often been cheered by the sight in the "coffee-room"—as if coffee could be made in an English inn!—of the faded cover of a "Kelly" of one of the southern counties I know well. But the copy must be old—it takes years for the undoubted prose or a brand new edition of "Kelly" to mellow into poetry and romance. The

red binding of the new edition, fresh from the binder, is like the red roof of a new house fresh from the builder: there is no story to tell of that house, no hope of discovery or adventure about it.

One must wait for its charm till the red tiles pale and the lichens grow thick on its walls. Generations that have gone make the house. Generations that have gone make the "Kelly."

People turn to "Kelly" for various ends. Many go to him to learn what is the rateable value; others to learn what is the soil, the sub-soil; what is the hundred, petty sessional division, archdeaconry, rural deanery. The sub-soil leaves me somewhat cold; the other matters I do not rightly comprehend. I go to "Kelly"—old editions, that is—and dive deep in him to discover, first, how many names of the "private residents" and "commercials" tally with the names of the "private residents" and "commercials" who live in this village or that to-day; and, second, to learn anew the exact mileage between the most outlying villages in the county and their nearest railway-station and market town. The first inquiry is sometimes rather sad, for in this roll-call of the villages and hamlets so many once familiar figures drop out between the editions. I must be very low if the other inquiry fails to hearten me a little There still are—"Kelly" and the Ordnance map prove it—places in England, places within a hundred—less than a hundred—miles of London, that are

largely undiscovered. "Kelly" of a few years back and the Ordnance map of to-day prove the argument of tarpaulin, the carrier's cart on the hill, that England has yet to be "opened up," "colonized," and put to indignities of that kind.

It is in just such a bit of uncolonized England as this that I set my small-holder, because it is there I have known the type during a great part of my life. "Kelly," a new edition or old, and the Ordnance map show that there are still South Country villages, to say nothing of hamlets, seven, eight, nine, ten miles from the nearest railway-station and small market town—and this within sixty or eighty miles of the world's railway terminus. Here, for example, is one on the map which has a town and good station eight miles over the hills to the south, and another town and goods station eight miles over the hills to the north. A neighbour village rivals it, being a good nine miles of flint—some of which still rolls down the hills in winter—from the nearest town, and seven and a half from the nearest small station. This is undiscovered England, to-day very much what it was when railways came to the shire sixty or seventy years ago—or, indeed, long ere railways came. Here is a third village of the same group on the map, six full, hard miles from the town and station; one may put it on the border-line of the discovered and opened-up, a village that looks on its more benighted neighbour as a sort of outlander.

These places can each show its small man in land who has come out of absolute peasant dependence—out of, say, twelve shillings a week, with hiring money at Michaelmas and a few allowances at Christmas—to the full pride of farmerhood. A "magic in property" there may be, but the soil of his native place, which charms a man upward out of his native station, is more magical still. The soil makes him drink water where his brother drinks beer or spirit, deny himself any but the coarsest food and clothing, sternly withhold from all luxury and relaxation. The soil sends him every week faithfully to the village post-office to add to his minute savings there. The soil makes him sweat from dusk till dark every working day of his life. All that one day he may rent two or three little fields with a little wood cow-shed, or at most a small farm worked by a lean beast and himself and his wife, and perhaps one village lad, and contrive through every known device of saving and toiling and haggling to make a living, not always far bigger, not always far safer, than that of the ordinary hired farm hand.

This is the small man in land, the earth's own chosen small-holder, as we find him in these English villages. They are villages often on the chalk, and that chalk is always full of flint. I might dissociate the man from the chalk, I could not from the flint. Flint works up everywhere to the surface of road and by-road, and to the surface of the fields. I have been

told a flint *grows* like a live thing, and can hardly doubt it. Gather together in heaps all the loose flints of any size on one of these fields, let that field lie fallow for a season or two, and behold the crop of flints upon it is as large as ever! And so through a succession of years. I have seen fields where one could not see the soil for flints, yet a year or two before the pickers had been at work—men and boys; and women, perhaps, with their babies in a go-cart under the shelter of a hedge or rick—and picked it clean, so it seemed, of every stone of any size.

Trust a flint, however, to catch a flint. I watched one of these small-holders of Nature work with his women folk and children on about the flintiest field I ever saw—and I have seen some—a four or five acre field at the edge of a sloping wood, and it looked as if to pick it clean for a crop they must take up the very soil. It was the harvest of the flint. The women filled their aprons and emptied on to the heaps that grew up all over that field, and in the end came the man and his cart, and all the heaps were made into one. This was the sheep-shearer.

Next year I saw the place of stones again, and it had turned the colour of gold.*

This is what men can do with the earth who were born to it. The earth is in the blood of this type of man, not merely in his skin. He must have been soiled in youth. The earth is his element. It is not

* "Life and Sport in Hampshire," p. 247.

particularly ours; we only rent it or own it or build on it, buy or sell it, theorize about it.

Imperceptibly from childhood up he has been gaining and storing a very peculiar lore of the soil, its temper, its taste—a sour taste in some fields—its power to produce, its need of change. This small man on flint has never read a book on farming. Very likely he has never since he left school read anything but the Bible on Sunday, and the local paper on Saturday night. Yet, none the less that it has not been printed, there is a whole book on land in his brain.

Never believe in the ignorance of these small men, who, without any of the chemist's arts, can yet turn flint to gold.

This minute, extremely careful science of the soil got from a single parish, and applied to a few poor acres, is no doubt a large part of the natural small-holder's stock. Call it his Consols. But, if so, there must be other gilt-edged securities of his holding. The earth habit is a great thing, and without it the hardest strivers in these fields will rarely get well rooted. But strong character and habit is wanted, too, for tackling flint; a habit of ceaseless toil, a lifetime of toil over trifles, and a lifetime of thrift. It is only when the two join, earth habit and character—the character not so gracious always as one might wish to find—that the root gets a sure hold of the soil and keeps it even through ill seasons.

Such in the rough is the successful small man on

flint. But even allowing for the full value of the earth habit and strong character and the power of the two together to win a living and freedom from the land, there is a mystery sometimes as to the way the small man started master. What did he take off from in his leap from man to masterhood? One has known cases where the savings banked at the post-office could not have been more than a few pounds when the small man—a carter, a carrier in a very small way, or a woodman—suddenly started farmer. In the latest "Kelly" I find the names of two men who began thus in the nineties. Both belong to the six to nine mile group of villages. Neither had any money capital worth the name, yet each started not on a field and a pig or cow, but on a farm and farmhouse complete. The man in the village nine miles from town and station is a perfect example of the natural small-holder in grit, in unending industry, in thrift, in hard bargaining power, and in the minute homely study of things that grow and soils that suit them. He was born to begin on a pig and a paddock. But he began on seven hundred acres, and he farms those acres to-day. He seemed to go in on nothing, when wheat was only worth growing for straw—the time in England when chaff was better than the grain! He and his brother, with a boy and a beast, worked that land. I heard they lived on sainfoin, and there may be more truth in the story than appears. But they had no cattle, no sheep. It never was known

how they got their plough and their cutter. How they got their landlord is not so hard—landlords were not very shy of tenants in those days on the flint. The thing is a mystery—a romance of roots; but I incline to think that if they lived on sainfoin when in, they worked their way in simply by force of character. Character in a struggle like this is, after all, a kind of capital, or equivalent of capital, which the old dictionary maker defined as "a stocke, a man's principall substance."

CHAPTER IV

DIPS

THE most undiscovered thing in hidden England is the village shop. A mystery, a romance, clings to it which began in our childhood, and has not passed away with many childish things. I never went into a real old shop, the shop of all wares, in a real old English village without a delicious sense of mystery. By village shop I mean not a mere branch of universal or national or international stores such as have been started of late years in many, if not in most, large English villages. These places, for what I know, may sell just as good salt butter and American cheese and bread and tinned salmon as the real place, and at a halfpenny a pound less.

But they are not the village shop. As there are *Biblia abiblia*, so are there shops that are not shops —things in the village shop's clothing.

The difference in mystery between a branch of the British and Continental Provision Stores (Limited) and *the* village shop, a shop that was born and bred in the village, and whose keepers were born and bred in the village—or, at least, whose keepers' forerunners were—is beyond reckoning. It is more than the differ-

ence between the sense of mystery felt in a mosque in Kairouan or Mecca and in a large, new Congregational chapel in a growing English market town. I mean no disrespect to the chapel, far from it, for the life and fervour of these spiritual sects in our countryside have long had a strong interest for me. But a building like this—a "new and handsome edifice," as it would be styled in a local directory—is so *physically* without the sense of mystery: whilst I have seen among wild Derbyshire hills the four plain walls and the flat roof of some poor little Methodist or Primitive chapel that abound in this sense.

Most things new and handsome—especially "edifices" and "residences"—want mystery. Things new and not handsome want it likewise; and among these is the yellow brick, be-windowed branch of the Universal Provision Emporia, which came into the hamlet with corrugated iron sheeting, and bungalows made of deal and lined, I should say, with a kind of baize or felt material.

It would be easy to find out everything the Emporium branch sells. It is quite likely that the place has even a printed list of the things. The charm of the true village shop is that nothing is inventoried in it. I cannot in all my dealings with the proper village shop recall being quite sure beforehand that it did not sell something I wished to buy there. Of course, there are certain things for which the thorough village shop simply could not be drawn blank. No

one ever drew it blank who wanted dips. Dips would do well for the coat-of-arms of a village shopman who became ennobled, and, seeing the money which some years since was to be made out of a first-class shop of all wares in a large remote village, the idea is not altogether fantastic.

A bundle of dips, hanging by their wicks from a nail on the wall, is a feature of the true village shop. One has known village shops where the smells of dips, of bootlaces—closely related to dips through tallow—of tanned gaiters, of corduroys, and of cheese have been in constant rivalry. If dips and cheese have it in one corner of the shop, corduroys have it in another. The scent of corduroy in the somewhat close air of an old village shop can be oppressive. I never took to it, even at the village shop in the days of faëry. Dips and cheese, bootlaces and gaiters, were much better. Dips fitted the stems of stable lanthorns that we lit and took into mystic woods at nightfall. There were three sorts of candles then, and in spite of denials I say there are three to-day: (1) wax, (2) composite, (3) tallow. Wax was drawing-room, composite ordinary. How far finer was tallow, being kept for out-of-door uses! A gang of poachers stole up the hanger one night and dug a badger from its great bury there. They did it by dips. I shall never forget the keeper showing me the drops of heavy grease at the mouth of the burrow. The scent of bootlaces was good, too, if only for the

quality of those laces—no base mohair there, but thick, strong leather, cut square. They were for real out-of-door boots, wood boots, boots for ferreting in winter. The scent of gaiters made a like appeal. The smell of cheese in a shop anywhere attracts me. It can suddenly create hunger with a keen edge where no hunger was.

Village shop cheese—American very often—is like the rest. It is cut at the village shop precisely as cut at the grandest shop or stores in London—with a plain wire, either end twisted round a little bit of white wood. Restless human invention cannot improve on this simplest of instruments—the acme of efficiency—the first word, the last word in cheese-paring.

I have sometimes thought I should like an hour behind the counter, with a spotless apron and the wire that cuts so fine and straight. I think I could force through the toughest Dutch cheese.

I have known a fortune in thousands made out of a village shop or two. Dips, not only the making of them, but the selling of them over the counter of Arcadia, can make a man safe in life; insure him and pension him without any aid from the State—on the contrary, in spite of the State. But it can only be done by a zeal in mighty small things. Twice, more than twice, Gilpin's ten tedious seasons might be spent without a holiday worth naming. There can be no leaping from the counter and till in this tor-

toise race to fortune—unless, of course, the fleet of the poet's fancy really were to come "yonder round by the hill," when our friend, who is not wanting in patriotism, would strike with his yardwand among the rest. This is a toil in trifles more trifling even than those on which the small man in land must concentrate.

It is the fortune that is founded from farthings. It is a fortune in dips.

There are some things in England to-day too cheap. I recognized this on going into a London shop and asking for a pennyworth of safety matches, for the packet was too large to go into my pocket. Now this was never one of the evils which the village shop business encouraged. Its customers are not made to buy a surfeit of anything for a song. There is no dumping dips upon them. Matches in Arcady are bought and sold in discreet quantities for a discreet sum. Thrift must be practised by the seller and the buyer alike. This is the system that runs through all the business of the true old-fashioned English village shop.

How hard is the work of the worthy who rises to fortune, through the shop, or to independence, which is to many strong natures the crown of fortune, we can realize if we consider the wide range of this business in many villages. This man or woman is universal provider. At the village shop we get not alone our string, braces, wire for rabbit nooses, billhooks, to-

bacco, crocks, blacklead, powder and shot for filling cartridges, scythes, spades, hay-rakes, prongs, boots, hats, clothes, drugs and sweetmeats, matches, butter and tallow, soap and cheese, we get our daily bread there. The best bread I have tasted—and sometimes the worse, too, it must be said—has been baked in the ovens of the village shop of all wares. Who would touch bread made by steam or other base mechanical means who instead could have bread baked in those brick ovens that are—or were—heated by a noble blaze of bavins?

I have seen the splendid glow of the bricks red-hot from that furnace which makes of big bavins a heap of fine grey ash, an ash that seems to keep pure the loaves set to bake on the bricks. It is a glow as fine as the blacksmith's forge. There is a virtue in that deliberate baking, a strength and a sweetness about the crusty loaves, which I think they may know little of who live on machine-made bread. Now, who ever heard of the local depot of some British and European Provision Emporium baking by bavins?

Considering what the shop of all wares is to the village—its baker, its draper, its druggist, its grocer, its tallow-chandler, its stationer, its confectioner, its hatter, its leather merchant—who can wonder that the folk who carry on this business are often characters? Think of their experience, of the life they must see, every side of village life, in the course of the season!

Not everybody goes to the parson or squire or Methody minister. Everyone goes to the shop of all wares.

The place is a news agency. Gossip, a simple necessity of life to village society, is business here, not idleness. It is wrapped up in the parcels and handed across the counter.

The man who keeps the shop of all wares can minister not alone to the bodies of the inhabitants. Is he not often a bright light in the chapel at Ebenezer-end?—he may hold the plate in church, and raise his voice with the choir, his surplice whitest of all. Needs of the body and needs of the spirit cannot be separated in a village if anywhere on earth. It is a narrow view that people like this can only work hard in carnal matters. One of the hardest workers I knew in this trade buried her husband in a corner of the churchyard only a step or two from the wall and side window of her shop of all wares. So she could keep an eye on him during the rest of her life. Browning said a man had two sides to his soul, one for the world and one for his wife. This woman had two, an inseparable two, one for the spirit and one for the shop.

CHAPTER V

THE FREE MAN

THERE is a princess in "Frederick the Great" who would take a pinch of snuff on solemn occasions for a protest against flummery. She was a plain one who had meditated from of old on the infinitely little. The man of all jobs, the handy man of the English village, has concentrated from of old on the infinitely little. Indeed, looking through my gallery of the workers in our country life, I must admit that they one and all are concentrated on the little. They are heroes in what the grandiloquent will regard as causes not at all heroic. The hurdler engaged in chipping off odds and ends of hazel sticks and in twisting bits of withy; the carrier in at most a jog-trot on the level and a crawl up and down the hill; the small-holder in piling little heaps of flint and hoeing rows of little turnips; the village shopman of all wares in doing up in scraps of waste-paper such trifles as a slice or two of streaky bacon, four dips valued at a penny, a coarse mug for tea or small ale, a birch besom, or a bootlace for a clod-hopper.

It must appear a niggard list to those who wish

to swell on bold, large acts and fine ideas. There is not a Jellaby in this gallery; no one to "raise the masses" at home or to go among the heathen abroad; no one to make a war or to stop it; no one to theorize, hold high argument, propound principles. True, among these hard workers there is plain living, but where, it may be asked, is the high thinking? It seems sure on the face of it that they are small-holders in those ampler fields, their horizon being just the nearest range of little English hills, an horizon of home. Viewing the matter in this light one is quite shocked by the mean limits which Nature sets to the heroism of the hard workers of village life. If one could only bring in some Robert Burns, even some Bloomfield, for the sake of appearance, or a village Hampden as a set-off against the village hurdler!

However, I draw some comfort from the commonplace of certain very prosy, true lines—got somehow by heart in early youth spent largely among these village workers—lines which tell how "little drops of water, little grains of sand, make the mighty ocean and the pleasant land." So nobility can be at work after all in the infinitely little. Besides, I am fortified by a rare and exquisite mind of the seventeenth century: one that could not think a commonplace, and valued the lesser engines above the great—set Regio Montanus's fly above his eagle.

To speak of a man as one who does odd jobs about

the house or garden appears to be a kind of reproach. We may think of hack-work; or even strike comparisons between odd jobs and old clo' or the hawking of rabbit skins. Such a man, to those who have not come across him in the countryside, that part of it at least that still lies aloof from the power of the town, may be thought of as a pariah, an outcast. He is to them a mere casual hireling, living from hand to mouth; fit for nothing in particular, ready to pick up a shilling out of anything that turns up. He belongs to no trade union, they conclude, and here they conclude right. A union of odd job or handy men of village life is unthinkable. Its forming would defy the craftiest of all organizing brains. It would be a flat contradiction in terms; for does not odd jobs imply no fixed hours, no fixed wage? What odd job man of mettle ever went into the overtime question? Any time he chooses is his time.

Whilst the world has odd jobs to do and odd hands to do them the principle of individualism can never be stamped out. The odd job, the handy man, is all unconsciously that principle incarnate. I wonder he has not been picketed.

People are right, then, who think that the man of odd jobs has no union to keep the number of his jobs within the bounds of law and order, but the rest of their criticism is founded largely on prejudice. There is no fair parallel between odd jobs and rabbit skins. Nor is there anything in its nature debased or

low about this calling, and the words "hireling" or "hack-work" often very far from fit it. Among the best types of manhood, full and independent, strong and kind and true, I have met, including all classes and workers by brain as well as workers by brawn, I often recall with affection two men of odd jobs. One had been a worker in the wood, the other in the iron, way. After forty years of work in the even line, work for a set wage at set hours, both changed into the odd line. They had spared enough to indulge henceforth in that one supreme luxury of every man reckoned a man, the luxury of freedom.

Man is born free, the sentimentalist complained, and everywhere he is in chains. The sentimentalist forgot there could be no freedom worth the name without chains. It is through gyves that freedom is so good. Liberty which does not come from battling through many years is a sweetmeat to cloy.

These two men were born to chains, and lived to free themselves by work. They had saved just enough to face the future without daring it; and henceforth they turned their hands to any job in digging, mending fences and outhouses, lesser carpentering, lesser building, road-making, tidying, that came their way. It is surprising how many small tasks do come the way of handy men like these in many a district once they have proved their industry and skill. That old tag about jack-of-all-trades and master of none

took no account of the able man of odd jobs. Only give this worker a paint-pot, some packing-cases, a saw, and a hammer and nails, and he will make something of nothing.

I had some packing-cases that were always in the way. Wicked nails and splinters threatened all who came near them. They would not be cut for firewood and defied the chopper and the saw, and their nails would not be drawn or hammered out. But when the handy man took them in earnest they grew into a good stout garden seat that has travelled with me from one county to another. Nails were coaxed out and straightened and driven in at fresh spots, and vicious wood that had jarred and splintered at my touch yielded as sweetly to the village handy man as dry logs of ash-tree to the boidel and wedge. Legs were fixed firm and a back against which one could lean with safety, and can lean now after years of use.

Finally came the paint-pot to make one white harmonious whole. My handy man was a Heppelwhite in the rough.

It was the same whatever he set himself to do. I can see him digging now. Anyone can dig after a fashion, but he was one of the stylists with a spade. It was as if a theodolite was in his spade or prong, the soil lay so finely level when he had done with it. He sowed and he planted and he clipped and he mowed with the same nicety.

It was much the same with the other handy man from the hamlet: his home-made fences or wicket-gates will last while the wood lasts. These men handle the scythe as if they had been trained to mow in the days before the machine-cutter became general in England, yet very likely they never worked in the fields as farm hands. They may never have worked a full day in the wood in their lives, yet the axe and the billhook fit into their hands as comfortably as the fiddle into the hand of the violinist. It is the same with all these simple tools of hand labour —the able man of the odd jobs can manage them with the ease and confidence with which a fine angler manages his rod and line or a professional bowler the cricket ball. Yet how hard it is to manage a scythe or an axe, which looks so easy, many an athlete or sportsman bred to life in the open knows well.

Not only handiness with the hand or skill with the body marks these worthies of hard work. The intelligence is something besides physical; there is headwork as well as handwork wanted for many of the tasks which the man of odd jobs sets himself to carry through. It is not showy intelligence, but one has tested it often and proved it sound and enduring in result. In an age when most people specialize, and commonly are helpless—one-armed or one-legged or one-eyed outside their specialism—these workers, starting late in years as all-rounders, can yet excel in

many little things that count. There is headwork in this. Besides, men who have won, unaided and shilling by shilling, the chief prize in the stern school of the poor—freedom, actual not theoretic—must be above the ruck in understanding.

CHAPTER VI

PRIDE, THE BIRDCATCHER

A FEATURE of most of these worthies of our absolute English villages and hamlets is the way they suit their environment. It might remind one of the processes of natural selection among birds and butterflies, a method of Evolution. The hurdler fits into the oak wood like a tree; the carrier and his cart on the hill are part and parcel of the landscape. It is the same with the small man in land who has founded his own fortune, and with the hoer and with the haymaker—they seem not to be mere figures on the scene, they are *of* the scene.

There was a familiar fashion of art in early Victorian times by which young ladies who made elegant water-colour sketches were always taught to introduce a picturesque human figure for a finishing touch. The custom was as general as touching up and finishing off the sky in the picture with a few short wavy lines signifying a flock of birds in the distance, rooks probably. This human ornament in the water-colour sketch often took the shape of a gipsy in a woodland path; or sometimes of a group of gipsies busy about a fire and kettle on a bit of common or roadside waste.

How well in the days of faëry we knew that kettle and that gipsy, with her bit of gay colour! It had been framed long since and bore witness to the elegant instruction of the young ladies of a generation or two before ours. The exact opposites to these figures of Victorian convention are the real earthy characters. The hard workers of the hoe, the hurdle, or the hill, bear no likeness to the water-colour gipsy in her bit of finery, with the water-colour fire and kettle on the common. Nature, not Art, put them in. There is nothing picturesque about their setting.

Pride, the birdcatcher, fits into the Nature scene, is of it, no less than the hurdler or the flint gatherer. He happens to be a townsman in his dwelling-place, but not the less through a great part of his working life he belongs to a wild land and water scape. Passing one day through a dreary back street in the gloom of snow drizzle I saw a crowd of pitiful creatures surging round a tall man who held up some tickets in one hand. In the crush he was driven forward helpless till the police went in and brought him out white, and short of breath it seemed. I asked an onlooker whether it was soup tickets the crowd was ravening for, but he said with a savage snarl, "No, it's the clappers, of course!" Clappers, or the boards of the sandwichman.

Tom Pride, the birdcatcher, carries his clappers too, a terrible heavy burthen of them sometimes—boxes, and cages, and stakes, and hammer, and nets

—for his six or eight mile struggle to and from the saltings. These saltings are the no-man's-land of the islet harbour. The whole of this flat sand and shingle place is scourged for days and weeks at a stretch by wind; and near the flash or kench, where the saltings lie, it blows often as fierce as anywhere on this islet of Æolus. It blows during the winter and autumn from all the quarters, and in a way which suggests that the wind has an undying spite against men and trees.

It is not only the black north and east that vent this hatred. The south and south-west show it through the tortured trees all along that low, bare, shelterless coast more even than the other winds. It is hard when on the islet to resist the idea at times that in the wind is an evil spirit howling and whipping viciously at every human being it can catch fairly in the open. There surely must be hate in such a wind, and the hate is reciprocated by the victims who will exclaim against the wind aloud to themselves and even curse it.

Often in the full lash of these winds the birdcatcher is working and watching at the saltings for hours together at his nets. The whole of the implements must be carried on his shoulders from his home in the town to the saltings, for there is not a friendly cottage or shed at this lonely place where he can leave them at night. The nets or traps with their decoys must be constantly shifted from day to day, for what is mud

in the morning may be water ere night; and a little farther out on the harbour those gleaming flats where purre and plover and redshank wade and whistle one hour are deep enough sea a few hours later to suck down and drown a strong swimmer. Stakes have to be hammered in at dawn and pulled up before dark, and all this work of trap and net laying will sometimes bring a paltry prize of only a few linnets, or some greenfinches and other odd birds, casual visitors at the saltings, that are scarcely worth carrying away.

Not every day, of course, wind or no wind, foils the birdcatcher thus. There can be heavy hauls of these nets as well as light. There are evenings when he can shoulder his burden, a weight on the back and a weight on the breast, and go home by way of the ferry, light enough in heart, for that one day's work has brought in a week's wage. Still, though linnets so abound in England to-day, almost anywhere in England, that any favouring day may bring in a good prize of them, the birdcatcher's calling is not what it was on the islet. For one thing, he has lost the goldfinches: they are on the forbidden list to-day all through the year, and goldfinches were once his chief prize. If a flock settled on the saltings and the decoys worked well he might carry home gold, indeed, that day.

A man is judged by the company he keeps, but who shall judge him wisely by the calling he follows?

There may be trades so pure in their environment

and so innocent of hurt to any live thing that we cannot think of a downright bad man following them all his days. I could never imagine a good hurdler a bad man. Work in a wood from dusk till dusk all through the seasons of a man's life should at least tend to strengthen and sweeten the worker. We can all agree to that. But what of the calling that brings pain? The birdcatcher follows a trade like this. We have been brought up to see in him a cruel if not downright bad man. We associate him, rightly, with nets and nooses, with decoys, with limed twigs, and all that sly device of a robber of liberty. What the liberty of linnets means one may best understand by going to the bird-fancier quarter of a great town and seeing the prisoners fresh from the wild.

A birdcatcher, then, ought to be a bad one, yet this man Pride is full of a tenderness and charity over many things outside his harsh trade; whilst for faith in spiritual matters he might put to shame many whose calling is that of the spirit. Tom Pride believes in God. There never could be a doubt about it among those who have talked to him whilst he is snaring the linnets to whom a cage is all torment and terror, and freedom to fly and to nest and to sing in the gold gorse in spring the most exquisite joy known to a living thing. Nor could anyone doubt who had heard him hold forth in his chapel on Sunday, for the birdcatcher is a deacon there.

Tom Pride *believes*. He takes Holy Writ as it is

written. "Those winged mysteries in divinity," he might claim with Sir Thomas Browne, "and airy subtleties in religion, which have unhinged the brains of better heads, they never stretched the *pia mater* of mine." There are no wingy mysteries for this bird-catcher—he long since clipped them.

He no more needs to set eyes on the Red Sea to believe the miracle than Browne needed. He *knows*.

He knows that there was a tree with the fatal fruit, though plants were not yet grown, and the gentle rain had not yet fallen on the earth; and he knows that the serpent went upon its belly before the curse. These things present no more difficulty or doubt to him than the Work of the Fifth Day—fowls that fly above the earth, every winged fowl after its kind, down to the linnets and finches which come to his decoys and harsh nets spread on the islet saltings.

Tom Pride is strong on the word then, but he has not stopped at the word. No one who knows his manner of life, away from the nets and nooses, will doubt that he can be strong in the act. Who ever reported him, on his hard trudge home from the saltings, to have entered the shop where they sell fire to put out the cold within a man? There is a long wait sometimes at the ferry when the tide is rushing out and the boat on the other side, and most of the workers spend a few pence on fire—fishermen and wildfowl shooters, and even those forlorn, only half-civilized creatures who search out some trifling shell-

fish or crabs in the creeks and mud flats, the true beachcombers of coast society.

The birdcatcher never tasted fire at the ferry. The fire to quench his cold he kindles at the chapel on Sunday.

All that is the hard, unyielding side of a man, virtue—but virtue with the sword and shield. He wrestles in prayer, an intense believing prayer, much as he wrestles with and throws the tempter. It is moral rectitude: all men respect and all men get out of the path of one who shines on this side alone. But the birdcatcher has the spirit of charity besides the spirit of combat. Dogs and children are drawn to him, and there is a tenderness about this rough man where many weak or suffering things are concerned. Perhaps he puts the bird in the cage, as the old fisher put the bait on the hook—as though he cared for it. Anyhow, here is the fact of a good man engaged all his working years in a calling that seems nothing if not harsh. It is one of the ironies of life from which we cannot escape for long.

CHAPTER VII

GILES CHAWBACON

I CONFESS to a lifelong admiration for the least refined figures of all in this gallery of the unrefined. It is impossible to deny the roughness, the absence of refinement, spiritual, physical, in the peasant mass of a country, those who are born and live and die Clodpole and Giles Chawbacon. Arnold divided the bulk of English people into three groups: Barbarians, the aristocrats by birth and possession who hunted, and fished, and shot; Philistines, enemies of his culture; and Plebs, the body of the people. But the absolute peasant, the field-worker who all his days is hoeing, ploughing, or haymaking, deserves a group to himself in any classing of the kind by the superior people. Arnold might in that vein have named this group the Brutes, in recognition of the immense burthen of slow, patient work they support.

Barbarian, it appeared, was not chosen by him in scorn, or for a reproach; he admitted, I think, to a certain sneaking kindness for the leisure and pursuits of this class. Barbarian is a sort of debased word, and so is brute often. Brute is, perhaps, a falsified term, one of Trench's "immoral words," and need mean

nothing ignoble; it can certainly stand for strength, constancy, toil, and immense service to mankind. These things on the whole we can claim with assurance for the plain field-worker of England, who never rises above that station.

Flint, the small-holder on the chalk and sainfoin fields, Tarpaulin the carrier, the skilled hurdler too, the odd job man, the village shopman of all wares, and Pride the birdcatcher, have been born or have lifted themselves out of this class. The blacksmith and the gamekeeper are equally clear of it. Anybody who has mixed at all in village society knows well that these callings give a man a higher rung on the ladder which narrows always towards its top.

It is the swaying heights of the ladder, the fine-tapered top, that give grace and beauty to the whole, but the solid support and weight lie about the lowest rungs. If that part gives the whole is flung. The bulk and strength of this ladder of the English village world is simply the English peasantry, that does not rise above its own thick, lowly rung so close to the earth.

Some people to-day would like to alter this. They wish to have the ladder the same size all the way up; whilst others speak and write as if they would like to pull down the ladder, set the heavy end uppermost, and try how that worked. But the worker himself, the man on the spot, has usually little faith in plans like these. He knows the ladder of life must taper from the coarse end to the fine. I was reminded

lately of a true example of this in a remote spot in the wild land of combe and hanger. An old friend of mine rode to the market town in the carrier's cart for the first time, and at the foot of the great hill of rolling flint he was ready to get out and walk with his fellow passengers, plain field folk. But Tarpaulin, the carrier, firmly waved him back to the bench.

"No!" said the carrier. "Quality drives—t'others walk."

The unrefinement of the absolute field-worker—the worker below the carter, far below the shepherd—is what no one can doubt for a moment. It is stark. Not the most Philistine of Arnold's Philistines was farther from culture, from the sense of the beautiful, than the solitary worker in our fields of old-fashioned farming England in the south, the turnips, the sainfoin, and the corn. Yet by a curious kind of paradox nothing in the landscapes of that land of lovely landscapes makes a surer appeal to the æsthetic sense in us than those same farm-workers.

Millet, a giant, may have got the French field-worker on to his supreme canvases, but no one has ever shown us in art the plain English field-worker. Artists often idealize the mower and the group, England-old, in the haymaking field: the English artist who can *realize* the mower and that haymaking act has not yet been born. At most the drama of it can be presented in a pretty or picturesque light. The nobility of the toil, the sense of immense age and

weight and force about it, and the mystery of it, seem to defy all art. The art of the engraver, perhaps, comes nearer to realizing something of the sombreness and mystery of this drama of heavy toil than the art of the painter, monochrome suiting the subject better than the glow or brilliancy of colours. But it comes only a very little nearer. The effect is never really fortunate. There seems to be no escaping the pitfall of presenting the workers in a sentimental light or in a brutal or in a banal one.

Is it not much the same in literature? Robert Burns, a giant like Millet, shows the cottar of the North no doubt very near to Nature, and Shakespeare's songs show the lighter side of the peasant of his time. But I know of nothing else that is supreme. Smart might have done it had his genius turned that way. Gray was too soft and Crabbe too grim, whilst Bloomfield and—on the whole—Clare were tame.

Richard Jefferies' story of John Brown the mower who stumbled one day and ended at the lintel of his cottage is perhaps the most moving thing in modern print about this field-work. It is finely felt and true and alive, but it is only a few lines touching one phase. John Brown the mower stumbled and fell just in time, for soon afterwards the scythe ended, and before the Eighties were out it had ceased to be one of the symbols of immense physical labour in the field. To-day, of course, it is hardly more significant than

the flail or the reaping-hook. It is fast degrading into a picturesque thing. One is glad to be able to recall great fields of heavy swishing corn going down before the rhythm of mowers. I recall a particular field of wheat going down in the swinking heat: one can realize somewhat the force and weight of the work in that field on the hillside after so many years. Machines are very good in the fields. It is all wrong to imagine they take from the excellence of landscape: they add to it; yet I think England lost something great in losing the work of the scythe—there was a test of immense endurance in it.

However, a test of the kind, if not quite its equal almost its equal, is in other forms of field-work. Sometimes, but not often, it breaks down the most seasoned and weather-proof of the workers. Great heat at the close of summer can hit terribly hard at those who toil hour after hour in the open. From shelter and under trees by the stream I have watched with wonder the hoer at work in the roots through the fiercest hours of the afternoon, when the leaves of the turnip or swede drooped under the stroke of the sun.

In the miry lanes and heavy soils of December and onward the feat of English workers shows, too, an almost equal endurance to that of the mower. To be up at dark and driving the plough till dusk on some soils, in hard weather or sodden, can be a test of manhood equal perhaps to that old one of the

mower at his prime. One knows this by watching the plougher jolting through the furrow of heavy soil that has been touched overnight by a sharp frost. Work with the wain and at the ploughshare in dark and dank, and with the hoe in the burning heat—that is the main part of the life of the plain field hand, the rank and filer.

It appears to be a kind of Homeric battling from year's end to year's end with the elements, with sun, frost, rain, wind, and with winter mud and summer dust—dust in the turnip-field and dust of the hay-pook.

But the whole life of these field-workers, pure and simple, is elemental. It is life shorn of nearly everything that is not elemental. Here we are down at the few root necessities of human life. Coarse victuals such as a hunk of bread and cold, greasy bacon, and a large clasp knife to eat them with; drink in a jar or tin can; shelter and sleep at night; some clothing to shield the worker from the wind and rain and sun, and if thought at all for to-morrow, none whatever for the day after—this is the part of the plain field hand's life that is not work.

Put the two together, the work and the wage of the work, and the sum total really is a life elemental-plain. It is something to shame us out of all amiable notions about living "the simple life." Sandals and caravans, and doing without servants and two ordinary workman's cottages knocked into one—

these cannot stand the comparison. Walt Whitman's poetry appears suspiciously like art when contrasted with this life of the clouted shoon to-day in our midst; and a little varnish may be perceived on Thoreau's own cedar-wood pencils.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRUE WATER-DIVINER

THERE are figures I could not for a moment separate in thought from the scenes in which they work. Environment is sometimes almost the man. A child's natural surroundings, sky and hill and wood and water, can play a great part in making character, perhaps not less than training and heredity. How fine in Wordsworth's "Excursion" is that opening passage about the shepherd boy among the wild woods and hills of Athol, and how the foundations of his mind were laid in that communion, "not from terror free"! Minds like this, with their fine sensibility to the scenes and changing moods of Nature, may be rare among the English peasantry—our South Country peasantry at least—but who can doubt that these things do influence some of our hard workers in the woods and fields and on the great billowy downs? No one disputes the power of the sea over the mind and disposition of many rough people whose work is on the coast, and the downs and marshes and wild woody places may likewise be potent in this as the sea. The wood reeve and the water-bailiff, who spend the whole of their working lives in lonely

spots, must often be as steeped in the spirit of the great Nature that lies about them as are the fishers and coast-workers in the spirit of the sea.

It is this one has in thought when saying that no good hurdler, working all his days in a great wood, can be wholly a bad man. The genius of the place, the strength, and rest, and sweetness of all things around, must work within him, however little conscious he may be of it.

Natural surroundings can effect the water-bailiff not less than the shepherd on the downs or the wattle hurdler in the wood, when not his work alone, his home too, is on the marsh or river common. The prevailing note of the South Country river, with large beds of reed and bullrush, where it widens on the flats and draws in little streams and springs from lesser valleys, is one of mystery; and that note is in the life of the worker. Even broad daytime can be mysterious among swampy meadows and osier beds. The evenings and nights are made of mystery there. The lights and shadows on the water and on the swampy spots, the voices of the water and marsh fowl, grebe and mallard and moorhen and red shank and snipe and rail—sharming, drumming, laughing, shrieking, whistling voices—and the flames of sunsets and the great lulling star scenes on dewy nights never lose their strangeness.

It is wrong to think that we want immense extents of land and water for mystery. Most familiar

and "tame" landscape in homely English countryside has it in abundance. The scene on the water-bailiff's river and common in December, soon after sundown, when on a clear evening Orion's suns are lit and pulsing intensely in the south over the little reedy swamp of the water-rails, can hardly be dwarfed in this by any scene of great spaces in an uninhabited country.

The water-bailiff should live by the water not less than the gamekeeper in the wood. This man I have in mind is hardly ever out of the swamp. After a wet summer or autumn, or after a white winter, his cottage floor is often under water. It is the outlying cottage of the outlying hamlet, where in some seasons not one cottage, not the inn, and not the farmhouse, is really dry. The founders of the hamlet, some time between Alfred's and the Conqueror's time, chose to plant themselves a foot or so above the summer level of the streams and springs and flush with the winter level, though by going a hundred yards or so farther from the marsh they could have grounded themselves high and dry for all time. The castle on the hill, the church on the knoll, the city by the big river; but the hamlet right down in the hollow often, or level with the swamp.

Perhaps they set their hamlet at the edge of the river marsh for health. Certainly it is many years since the mud and plaster cottage, with the reed-thatched roof, was without its tenants; and the

tenants there live long. I seem to remember hearing there was a succession of them in this and the neighbour cottage, each of whom was far in his or her seventies or eighties before the end came. They died of a fatal complaint in those parts—old age. Many of the hamlet folk—hamlets on the hills, hamlets in the hollows—have a name for nearly every disease that flesh is heir to—the name "rheumatics." "The head-ache" is rheumatics. It is "i' the nerve," as one of these workers explained to me, and therefore is the "rheumatics." It twists the hands and feet out of all shape. It crooks the body, so that the carriage of a great knitch of birch underwood stuffed with chips, or a bavin of heavy, thick oak and hazel, from the copse, up and down hill may be an easier burthen than it looks to a straight-backed man. The disease pricks and burns and chills. Still, they die not of rheumatics, but of being over eighty.

They often begin with the rheumatics—which might seem to be almost a prophylactic against disease, seeing how it includes the aches of so many diseases—in early middle age. The water-bailiff, with all his strength and endurance, has it already. Waterproof a man from head to foot, he yet must have the rheumatics if he works and lives in the river swamps and commons. There is no waterproofing "the nerve."

A man out from dawn to dusk every day of the year in a place like this should, we imagine, be a natural historian. What may he not know of the birds

and the small beasts that at one season or another, or throughout the seasons, inhabit the banks of the streams, the osier and reed beds, and the bits of dry gorse common that rise clear of the water? Yet these men often have little lore of the kind. The larger features of Nature, the solemn moods and mysteries of these marsh and river scenes, do touch them, however little they may know it. But there the intimacy with Nature often ends. The whole of this man's working life is summed up in the word "trout."

Trout is victuals, drink, clothing, and housing to the water-bailiff. He is a specialist, and this is his branch of Nature and of history.

To know the trout is first and foremost to know the water, and this man's knowledge of the water is like the natural small-holder's peculiar lore of the land. Most people, even those who live within the sight and sound of running water, and rejoice greatly in it, know next to nothing of its ways. They know when a flood comes, and they may notice sometimes if the stream is flowing foul. To all the finer, subtler changes of a clear running water that is ever changing they are blind. But the water-bailiff notes from day to day, and perhaps several times in the day, the smallest changes in the flow and level of the stream. It rises an inch or falls an inch or less in the course of the morning or afternoon, and he knows it at a glance. Faintest signs on the stems of reed or bull-rush or willow herb or other river plant serve for

sure and exact measures to him. His constant study is with things that concern the flow of water, dams and mills and carriers and hatches.

He has an eye for the watermarks of a stream that an expert at Threadneedle Street has for the watermarks of a Bank of England note. It is the troutkeeper, not the magician with the hazel wand, who is the true water-diviner.

The old sense of spoor and stalk is not quite gone out of everyday human life and use, and may not have gone with the last of the American Indians and the African hunters hunting for livelihood. It lives to-day in these men who watch in our own little English woods and by the trout streams. The water-bailiff's work is to watch the waters for the least signs of the enemy as it is the woodkeeper's work to watch the soil. The enemy of enemies is the fresh-water shark. It seems beyond the wit of man to root out pike and jack in a trout stream once they have flourished there. The pike is like the sparrow and the rat. The pike might make us believe in that old faith of spontaneous generation, or at least in the theory that out of pickerel weed come pike. Many think they can see into clear water. But if they spend a day by the clearest of waters with this man they know better. The water-bailiff's eye will find a jack where no jack was. With his wire and pole he has thrown hundreds of pike and small jack in a few seasons which the trained eye of an angler missed. A pike when it finds

itself watched will sometimes fade into deep water or weeds, but the illusion cannot cheat this watcher with the wire. He has an eye, too, for the heron in the sky which a swallow has for a hawk. He never missed the spoor of an otter on the mud or sand of the river bank.

The water-bailiff differs in one matter from most of my other worthies. He is the hired man, the dependant. He differs from Tarpaulin the carrier, and from the man of all jobs, and from the man of all wares. Where they go free through serving many, he is bound through serving one. Even those humblest of workers, the mole-catcher and the rabbit skin hawker, taste more of the luxury than he: the lowlier, the more luxury—it is one of the paradoxes of freedom. Taking livery, this watcher of the trout did doubtless in some degree forgo a liberty of sorts. But the luxury can be bought too cheap and at the wrong market altogether. Everyone who knows anything of the world of the village knows that loafing sometimes passes for liberty. The hired man of outdoor English life is often one of the best of all these hard strivers. England is what it is in no small degree through the trusty serving man.

CHAPTER IX

BAKKY BERKSHIRE

THE first man I remember seeing in a smock, and the one man in real working life I can to-day distinctly picture in a smock, was Bakky Berkshire. The smock in the land where I was bred about ended with Bakky. It might almost have died of ridicule through him. A book, named Akerman's "Wiltshire Tales," which held the sayings of a certain Wiltshire moonraker, William Little, was printed some sixty years ago by Russell Smith, in Soho Square. It was a little classic of its kind, a classic of Clodpole, and deserved to live on and be reprinted far better than prouder books that have overwhelmed the author, John Yonge Akerman, in the gross competition of literature. Having known Bakky Berkshire in my childhood, I know how entirely true to life were those sketches and stories about William Little and others.

Bakky was a country clown. I doubt if anyone is now living who could pick this strange creature's grave out of the rows of nameless mounds at the old burying-place of the village. (Those nameless ones having grown so thick in the churchyard that the bones began to push up at a new burying, they took

in a plot from the next field.) Nature alone keeps his grave green; it is Nature's pleasantry to keep greenest graves that are most nameless and unknown. But, though no one can call to mind to-day exactly where Bakky Berkshire was put away, there must be still a good many folk in those parts who can tell a tale at his cost. Bakky, indeed, was a butt for every wit in that group of remote villages.

I have tried to sketch the barest outline of him in a story of the race-course of Wildmoor,* which was done away with because it encouraged local betting and horseplay. But how much greater was the fact of Bakky than any fiction of him could be! I was a little part of Bakky's life when he was in his prime; and I bird's-nested and ferreted and shot and gloriously idled with garden boys and keepers' sons who were full of stories of him and sayings by him. If I had only kept a faithful record of Bakky, I know it would be a thing to hoard and treasure now. The man was an original. He was somehow secure, had been rapt away from influences which sap individuality. If he had ever been inside a school, which I doubt, he had not unlearnt there any of the odds and ends of early years and environment which it is the business of "Education" to clear right away. There was not an atom of compulsory Greek in Bakky. He had no more been refined than he had been forced.

I never heard who for sure was his father or his

* "The Welsher" in "The Leaning Spire."

mother, or in which of the group of hill and hollow hamlets he was born. But he seems to have been wild from an early age. He could not read or write a word. He made a cross for his name if called upon to sign. The sign of the cipher would have been fitter than the sign of the cross, for in all branches of learning or scholarship he did stand for zero. All he knew he knew through Nature.

Bakky seems to have had no revealed religion. He was a pure pagan. He was one of the heathen whom in middle life no missionary could ever have really touched. Had he been caught in early childhood in his wilds, there was, perhaps, no reason save his obstinacy why he should not have been converted; and the soil of the man's soul being virgin soil it might, who knows, have grown a crop of good acts. In all the stories of that countryside told against the clown I do not think there is one that points to any deed of sheer ill-nature by him. In his cunning was no malice. But his obstinacy was a bar which, I think, no missionary could have broken through. No reasoning could shake him.

He had managed to save a small sum out of his earnings as cowman, pig and poultry attendant, and from other lowly callings; and when an aunt or sister died—for he seems to have had obscurely a few obscure relations outside the neighbourhood—and left him a hundred pounds his mistress begged him to put the whole into the savings bank at the village

shop. But Bakky scoffed at the idea. Put it in a little shop like that? A pretty plan, indeed! And how was he to know that they would not make off with it? Why, the whole shop and stock were scarce worth a hundred pound! He was told that, if the shop went, the State remained. But no assurance could assure him.

A crafty old dog will scrape a hole in the ground and bury the bone which he does not want to eat at the moment. Bakky had the natural animal craft. He made up his mind to bury his bone. He put it into a bag and scraped a hole in the thatch and there hid it. But a thief came one day when Bakky was away from the cottage where he rented his room and stole it all. A little later the village shop that stood for the savings bank was broke too, and the owners did actually make off with the till. What foresight in folly was Bakky's! It must have been ordered that this child of Nature should never be won over to the way of man.

The loss of a fortune will beat down many men in a station past all measure above that of Bakky Berkshire and his type—type which still lingers and crops up here and there in England to-day. It did not overthrow this man for a moment. He was at his daily round, smocked and in his right mind, an hour or two after the loss was discovered, and when every tongue but his was full of it. The loss of the fortune left him as the gain of it had found him,

with only this difference—it left him a little craftier and a little more obstinate; had a second fortune come to him, he would have chosen quite another hole in the thatch, and have been a good deal more secret in the hiding of his treasure.

Whatever he had done with it there would have been no weak resort to the State. Bakky knew too much about the State after his shrewd suspicion as to the soundness of the village savings bank had been borne out. Besides, in that very neighbourhood at that time there was another object lesson in the risk of dealing with the State. A field hand, rummaging one day among the great barns on the chalk down above the village, lit on a pot full of gold pieces. He put them by in dull excitement till his working week was done, then walked eight miles into the market town, and sold them to the goldsmith. They were good spade guineas of the eighteenth century, and with them he bought a gold watch and chain. One or two guineas he kept and fixed to the chain, but they glittered so brightly that the State came right down into that hamlet and there was a great ado about treasure trove. So the watch and chain went back to the goldsmith, and another fortune was lost to World's End.

All the people there had laughed at Bakky Berkshire for thinking so little about his gold that he did not take it to the State for safe keeping. Now they could laugh at the other man who had thought so

much about his gold that the State came down and took it away from him for safe keeping.

Bakky was no braggart. Before he lost his fortune, through the thatch being too thin, he had never, like that vain finder of treasure trove, thought of wearing it on his waistcoat. He had not spoken a boasting word about it. A certain added cunning to his stock of cunning was the only change about him one could mark. Bakky was all animal, and this cunning and mule-like obstinacy were his chief traits. Deeper in his nature was a third quality which only appeared at a crisis. To the cunning of the dog over its victuals he joined the faith of the dog in its master.

The loss of his bone never dazed him. But the loss of his mistress utterly confounded him. He had long had charge of the key—the "kay" he called it—of the cowhouse; and, while he had it, there was no getting rid of him for acts of gross disobedience—all caused by the mule and hog in his strange nature. The key was hung up by Bakky each evening at the close of his work on a nail under the thatch of the cowhouse. At length his mistress took down the key herself, and put it in her pocket. That ended him. Round and about the place next day he wandered, searching under the thatch, trying every rusty nail, and asking where was the "kay" of the cowhouse? All his life was on that nail. He left the place after this, and I cannot recall seeing him again. Perhaps like the worker bee, whose hive has been moved whilst it is out, he should have died in the evening.

CHAPTER X

THE WORKING ENGLISH FARMER

GOING to Cornwall I missed the Camelford train at Okehampton and had to stay the night there. Next day, after a walk on Dartmoor, I went into the old White Hart Inn. It was market day, but lunching early I found only one man at the board. Though not a giant in stature, he had the thews of Anakim. The whole of him bespoke the knit perfection of manhood, and a certain vibrant force that recalls my old shooting friend Barehills, who farmed chalk and flint on the sainfoin downs. I began to talk to my companion, and soon found him a true man in head and heart as well as in build. He told me of his grass and clover hopes and fears, and of the nature of the soil and lie of the land in that part of England; and in exchange I told him of our downs and clear, slow streams in the meadows. He spoke well and in good English, and had an eye and thought for landscape. But what after a while chiefly interested me about the man was the way he dealt with food. A great cold pasty was on the board between us, disclosing, when a portion of the lid was raised, excellent meat and gravy. He laid to, as we talked, and

I felt a mean thing paltering with a bit of stale bread-and-butter and a scrap of meat whilst he did his duty. There was nothing coarse in the way he ate and drank; no sign of surfeit at the close of the meal when he rose and bid me good-day, and went briskly into the market to buy or sell. There was just the glow of perfect animal health: soundness in head, hand, and heart of an English farmer.

This man was no doubt above the average of his class, in mind and body alike, but I know that I have not to go far on a market day in an English farming town, or search curiously, to find the type. Is there any vainer criticism of a whole class than that which decries the English farmer as one who has failed, and merely cumbers the land, and should be thrust out to make room for hairbrained Socialism? The thing strikes me as a jest without point to it. Those who insist on taking the jest gravely, and believing implicitly in the paper, could be cured if they chose. They need not travel so far as the White Hart at Okehampton. If they live in London they can go down on market day to almost any small farming town in Wiltshire or Berkshire, where the main crop still is corn and the meat mutton. The man of sense —or the man of feeling—has only to sit down at the "ordinary," or go into the market to watch the bargaining, or later in the day return in the evening train for a few miles with a party of these fathers of the soil—he will find his scorn for the working

English farmer even in the most old-fashioned farming districts already modified. It is impossible to sit or travel for an hour or so with these worthies without finding they have some of the great essentials of manhood. I know little enough about the right order of crops, about roots and corn and grass and fallow, but I reckon a hard English farmer's talk about these things, still more his sheep talk, very well worth hearing. It stimulates and refreshes, being full of the true stuff of knowledge, hard original experience. An argument between these men gets right down at the root of things.

One can learn more about sainfoin and swede by listening to half an hour's argument at the ordinary, or in the evening train between the market town and the village four hundred feet on the North Downs, than by studying half a dozen scientific or botanic handbooks. The real handbook is in the man who draws a living for himself and circle from flinty fields and bare windy downs, where four inches below the surface is white rock; who fights ill seasons sometimes by the series, and always the chance of wheat falling below thirty shillings. I know this, because I was constantly with these men when corn was below twenty-five, and can recall a week when it came down to seventeen shillings and ninepence a quarter in my own country.

If they turn to the theme of sheep—as they are sure to turn—you must recognize then that you never

knew before what a ewe was: it is a strange beast to you, like the okapi or the armadillo about which you have only a little second or thirdhand knowledge through travel books.

The idea that the working farmer in these ordinary soils that grow bread and milk and mutton is an unknowing man in soils and crops, slow-witted and pig-headed, is a strange, absurd delusion. He is at school all day long, the great school of the open, with the elements as teachers that simply never relax.

But a better thing than the intimate lore of plants and beasts—a lore, in many of these men, large and exact in detail—is the character of the farmer of the downs whom one meets at the ordinary or in the market square on Friday or Saturday. All through crises of fortune, which in most callings shake and unnerve men more or less, a fair example of a working farmer keeps a good heart. It is the same through a long drought that threatens to leave him with no keep for his cattle, as through spells of wet at hay-time and harvest. Either means a heavy loss on the year to him if it lasts a week or so longer, often downright ruin. Yet he shows none of that fever and fret that are common to other callings to-day. He taps the glass once a day when many of us must be tapping it at each hour.

I think anyone who truly knows our ordinary kind of working farmer in his everyday life must agree he is not a man on wires. Through a crisis for his crops

he can talk with friend or stranger equably enough about matters other than the supreme matter to him. It is a good thing for a country to have a large body of men who are not on wires even at the crisis of their fortune. It is gold reserve, bullion, at the bank of a nation's manhood.

The type of man I have had in thought is the corn and hay and sheep farmer on ordinary or light land, who works anything from, say, three or four hundred to a thousand acres. He was very likely born and bred on the land, and may have followed his father in the very holding he works to-day. The "second generation" falls away from merit, we know too well, in many a calling; often it is burdened too heavily with a capital which it had no part in making; besides, it seems that character, like genius, can exhaust itself in a generation where the output has been large. No doubt the next generation does fail at times in this calling of the earth as in the industries of city life, and in art, and pure intellect, and invention. But I think that, if we could go deep enough into the fortunes and failures of families, we should find that good man more often follows good man in this way of life than in the more artificial callings.

Does it not really appear as if there were some secret virtue in the soil, which can pass into those who have been long and closely in touch with it?

This striving man of sheep and corn has two sides to his soul, like my friend in the shop of all wares,

and on first thought they seem to conflict somewhat. One part of him is given up to the study of the earth and growing things; the other to hard-fisted bargaining in and out of the markets. The man who through his calling, simplest, eldest, and nearest of all to Nature, might seem the securest from competition, yet lives in its constant clash; and if he fails in that ordeal he must go under, however well he knows and treats the soil.

A good farmer must be a hard bargainer. It is not a happy thought for those who desire something like the man in Pope's lines who lives the self-contained life, supplied with his own food and fuel, and fleeces for his homespun, by his own piece of ground. But there is no escape from it. In the minute attention to the nature and need of soils and the growth of green things, the working farmer reaches up to the idealist; in the plain plenty of his food, too, in the fostering of his flocks, in the life in the open in all weathers and seasons, and often in the site and simplicity of his home. But at this point Utopia ends; for the farmer must leave the world of Nature and come down to do battle in the world of men. A dreamer may deplore the fall. I cannot see it so in dreams or awake, because I feel that to put away the market is simply to put away the manhood.

PHASE THREE

ENGLISH WILDS

CHAPTER I

MAGIC OF THE MORN

I

BIRDS, singing birds especially, what a feature they are of English scenes! I have an enthusiasm for them that varies somewhat like one's enthusiasm for books and for friends. It is not a confession of fickleness in taste or in faith: we come back with a new onset of enthusiasm to the old books or friends as we come back to the prime bird favourites after we have missed them for a while. Our faith does not falter, it only rests a time to recreate itself—it is not falser than that. It spares us from a dead level plain of appreciation, the level of monotony that cannot allow of any of the peaks and high places of vivid feeling and glow.

The case of the favourite birds seems to be quite analogous to that of the favourite books, except that one's enthusiasm for certain kinds of birds varies almost regularly according to the season. In later May or in early June in England I find no bird to excel a blackcap at the top of his form—though there was probably a week or so earlier in May when black-

birds were the best birds of the English year. But it is sure that months after one will come back with fresh zest to the magic of the redbreast and the redbreast strain when it has grown anew to be the most ruling and poignant note—the very key indeed to which the whole composition of an autumn day seems tuned!

That redbreast feature, first in the calm and serene stage of English autumn and then in the wrack and ruin of it, and in the wretched drenching storms of mould and death, is one of strange power and insistence. It is hard to understand how such an incident apparently so trifling as a short passage of most familiar song in a small bird can impress itself alike on ears that know many birds' songs and on ears that, ordinarily, care very little for such things. Yet so it is. A reference which I once made to renewal of the full redbreast strain brought me a letter from a reader who recalled some lines in Keble's "Christian Year" for the twenty-first Sunday after Trinity, and an extract from some verses by George Cornish given in a note. I do not know Keble's book, but I can easily understand that a man of his feeling would be stirred by the redbreast renewal. It can affect even natures that seem the least sensitive to such influence. I remember returning home as a boy after a long day's partridge shooting with one who knew very little, and cared perhaps even less, for natural magic: a redbreast perched on an outer twig of a

great lime-tree breathed into the stillness of the early autumn day with the deliberate drawn-out strain, complete from start to finish. My companion stopped to listen, and, turning to me, said, "I *love* that!" Setting aside nightingales, which have a kind of universal appeal, partly by force, partly by fame, that is about the only word of praise for a bird song I remember hearing from the same lips. The incident and the whole scene have often recurred to me as a sign of Nature's power to enter, even through doors that seem locked and bolted against the lesser things.

I think that the effect of the redbreast strain on my sporting companion at the close of that late September afternoon may well be common to a great many people who do not even know what the bird is that is singing. It is common also, I doubt not, to many peasants who are taken up in fields and woods from dusk till dark with hard hand and foot toil that cannot make for æsthetic feeling, though among them it will remain subconscious and unexpressed.

The power of the weak redbreast strain is, indeed, a constant wonder of the commonplace natural world around one, recognized anew each September and October with fresh homage unimpaired by frequent use. It is a chief feature of an English year. I do not know whether the same thing is true of any other countries. Abroad I have only heard the redbreasts at the close of winter or at the start of spring; the effect of the song then and there is good, but of

quite another quality; the spring redbreast is good —sometimes in March very good—in England, but it wants the impressiveness of the September and October strain.

The power of the redbreast strain is masterful, then—it will often seize the attention of people who have not the instinct or the patience for detail, for "small deer," outside human affairs. One comes back to the old strain with unfailing homage each September in England after one has forgotten all about redbreasts for months, or the best part of a year.

But there is another bit of Nature magic that may touch the fancy even more than the redbreast strain. I mean the renewal of the willow warbler's song about this time. I have known willow warblers since I first began to watch birds at all closely; but, oddly enough, I did not know that the willow warbler renewed its song in late summer and early autumn till a few years ago. Since I learned that it does renew, I have found a growing charm about the willow warbler. A delightful thing about the willow warbler is that after an absolute silence of six weeks or two months it starts to sing again near the eve of its departure. It sings even on its journey, the opening stages of the way when it is dropping south towards the coast, leaving its spring and summer home.

Mr. Ralph Hogdson, who has got these "leaf warblers," as well as the goldfinch and the blackbird, into his poetry with a touch of magic to match their

SHAKESPEARE'S OWN CLIFF.

own, told me he woke one day in August to hear the willow warbler singing outside his window in a small back London garden! Three mornings running it sang in the same spot. Then, doubtless, it passed on south. The willow warbler is heard every spring for a few days in the London parks, after it has come from Africa and is working north to its nesting quarters, but a willow warbler singing in August in a dingy and small back garden in London was new to me.

One day I heard its autumn song early in September. It was just outside my open window, and the song was the first thing I heard on waking. It was as if the song had roused me; I thought, how could a willow warbler rouse the lightest sleeper! The sylph sang for a bare half-hour or so, and next morning, waking soon enough, I could count on the same charm. Later, at half-past seven or eight o'clock, if the morning is bright and sunny, there is the confused bird babble of starling chatter and castanet, with the call of greenfinch and the ditty of wren and the blatant chirrup of the sparrows; and if the willow wren is still singing then, the effect of it is quite spoilt.

It is thus a very trifling measure of song the willow warbler gives me on a September morning, and, to know its worth I must have it before the sparrows have aroused or when they are happily absent. But with the air and other conditions favouring, the willow warbler's half-hour of September song soon after full

light, is an exquisite little experience. The thing is fay-like, delicate beyond all reasonable explanation!

You may as soon translate to satisfaction a burning lyric of Shelley's "Hellas" or "Prometheus" into cold prose as account exactly for the pleasure felt in listening after daybreak to the farewell notes of this willow warbler. It is in the bird, but subtly, too, it is in the magic of the morn.

* * * * *

The song of the redbreast at dawn—as, indeed, all through the autumn day—and the song of the willow warbler at dawn have most distinctly a quality in common—pathos. The redbreast has the pathetic suggestion to my ear more than any other bird. No doubt the nightingale and the ringdove have it, but they have other qualities in a longer measure which make me less conscious of the pathos. The nightingale has the brilliance that masters and suppresses all other qualities in the song. The ringdove has intensity.

There is no note of an English bird, I doubt if there is a note of any bird in the world, to approach the ringdove's in intensity. I have noticed this especially at the close of summer. The ringdoves are heard to fine effect on late summer and early autumn afternoons, but they are very early wakers, and about their notes, too, is often the magic of the morn.

I never woke with real grudge against any bird but two: first, the voluble house-sparrow; second, the loud, unmuffled cuckoo. Shakespeare wrote of—

"The plain-song cuckoo gray,
Whose note full many a man doth mark
And dares not answer, 'Nay.'"

But one is pained by the shout of cuckoos at the first gleam of light in May and June for quite another reason than that which tortured the heroine of "The Woodlanders." It has a cruelly wakeful ring. There is nothing drowsy, and nothing low or soothing in the call. After the sparrows and the cuckoo have started with a vengeance, there is rarely any turning of the key softly in "the oiléd wards" of sleep. It grates and clangs. Whereas the willow warbler and the redbreast may bring the boon that is deferred till light. They never took it away.

Had Wordsworth added to his sound of rain and flock of sheep and white sheets of water the meek song of the willow warbler at dawn, it might ere the third night have given him his desire.

II

If the redbreast is *il penseroso* in the magic of the morn the wren is *l'allegro*. I know of no small voice in Nature through an English year in every month that suggests joy and pure mirth quite as the wren suggests them. He never knew or had forgot the wren who found in the cricket the creature of incomparable happiness. The gold of this extra-

ordinary little bird's joy rings absolutely true. It was minted without the least alloy. In the songs of most or all the best singing birds I can recall there is some "sadness in the sweet, and sweetness in the sad." It is so with the blackbird and both thrushes, with the redbreast, the blackcap, the nightingale, and the willow warbler. Something pathetic is found even in the shrill of the skylarks at dawn and through a May morning—I mean there is a suggestion of pathos for human ears and thought.

But I never found a trace of it in the song of wrens. It is the same at all seasons of they ear and at all hours of the day. The redbreast's song in early spring expresses something to my sense quite different from the redbreast's song in autumn; the wren's song seems to express exactly the same at both seasons.

It is the same at "the first low matin chirp" as it is at full quire an hour later when the sun is right up and the mystery of things dispelled by the familiar. The note of the wren is simply joy bubbling, brimming over.

Nor when the lively rattle of the irrepressible bird is once acquired—in July and perhaps for a week or two of August it may be rather broken and fragmentary—does the quality or excellence between wren and wren vary. I have never been struck by the excellence of any particular wren at any season. True, the wrens in Italy, both on the mainland and in Sicily, seem to me to sing louder than English

wrens. The Rome wrens, for example, about the gardens and precincts of St. Peter's and the ruins of the Forum, sing louder in spring than ours, quite a clatter and little din of them among the old walls; but there is nothing like the variation in excellence which I constantly remark among thrushes, blackbirds, chaffinches, and nightingales.

The wren is not, I think, a late evening singer like the song-thrush and the redbreast of summer, but he starts early in the day, and, as I have found in Sussex, he is wide awake soon after the first glimmer of light on a late August morning. The wren wakes and at once gives his whole sparkling ditty: it is not first the low matin chirp and then the full quire—it is full quire from the start.

Size, we could recognize, has nothing to do with spirit. Many of the smallest things in Nature, certainly among birds and butterflies, stand out as Spartans in spirit. The smallest English butterflies, as the Bedford blues and the coppers, and the purple hairstreaks which linger on almost through September on some of the oaks, seem all valour and impetus. But, not the less because there are so many examples of the mite exceeding in spirit the mighty, the charm and humour of it always touch us when we find the great heart housed within the tiny thing. Among English birds at least I should say the cock wren singing hard or the cock wren building hard and singing hard at the same time gives the greatest

display of spirit. He looks the part he sings—the blithest of them all!

He has no undersong like a blackcap or blackbird. A wren does not drop casually a few low, lisping notes among the leaves whilst he is searching for food. At dawn and at dark he does not give a drowsy note like some peepy song-thrush or crooning blackbird. Like the cuckoo, he is never half sleeping in his song—though he can pass almost instantly from full song to sleep, I know—but one could not regard the wren as one regards the cuckoo—an enemy of sleep at dawn. The song of the wren, in England at least, is too sweetly pitched for that.

The wren's song has not much of that sense of mystery which other notes are steeped in then—"the earliest pipe of half-awakened birds." But it is very fresh and delicious, and I suspect it has the merit of constancy, and that if we attended carefully we should find the wren in many spots singing at early light on and off throughout the English year.

In autumn and winter this magic music of English birds at early light is nothing like what it is in late spring and summer; the "full quire" of it makes a very small book indeed compared to the great volume then. But its value is enhanced by its scarcity. There is not much more than half an hour, or on very favouring mornings perhaps in all an hour of it—just the redbreast and the wren, with now and then a

starling, a song-thrush, a goldcrest, and a ringdove, and a fragment or two at rarer intervals of the chaffinch. The winter day once full lit, it is over. By half-past eight o'clock the air is as songless as it was before the first glimmer of light.

What leads the wren and redbreast to sing thus when the light of shortening days is creeping in at dawn and to cease—though the redbreast breaks out anew later—when it is full tide flooding all the world? I never can determine this. It may be that light after dark affects the musical part of a bird, as sound at other times affects it and urges it to song. A second explanation is that the bird is restored after sleep, and on waking has all the happiness and heart to sing. Yet the redbreast and the thrush sing with fine expression and spirit before they retire to sleep in spring and summer eves, which seems to tell against the theory of song thanks to sleep. I have sometimes thought of quite another explanation, rather grosser —that they sing in the dusk before they sleep and again in the dusk after they have been roused by the first glints of light, because they cannot see then well to feed. But the singing habit at dawn and dusk seems really to be obscure. One can only hazard a guess about it—"We are here to guess." I know this alone for sure—that it is one of the best things in the natural world. There is an anodyne in this magic of the morn.

* * * * *

For a few weeks in the year the magic is the blackbird's. If you sleep with windows wide open and the blackbird is the bird of the neighbourhood, he can actually wake you at dawn unless the sleep is very sound and deep. I cannot think a willow warbler really ever roused at dawn the lightest sleeper, though when we wake the song may be in the ear and thought. Here, by the way, is an odd little coincidence of willow warblers. Mr. Ralph Hodgson's willow warbler that sang soon after dawn in a back-garden in Chelsea in August had a forerunner that sang in the street just outside Elm Park Mansions in Chelsea in August. Another friend wrote to tell me of it. It sang at 7.30 a.m. "There are a few trees, a very few, in the street; imagine my amazement and delight." What is new under the sun about birds or song?

No; the willow warbler never woke a man—the man only woke to the willow warbler; but I can believe it easily of the blackbirds after hearing them in one or two Mays in gardens by the south coast of England full of cluster pines. At first light in May and June the blackbird, beginning somewhere the other side of the house, or in the shrubbery or copse two hundred yards away, seems to sing at least half asleep. It is a gurgle of low-pitched notes. It has not the silver sequence of his flute when the sun is right up, but it has a rare sweetness and mystery. The drowsy blackbird must have been in that strange

medley of birds which, in "The Princess," is imagined for dying ears:

> "When unto dying eyes
> The casement slowly grows a glimmering square."

In the same mysterious medley I put the redbreast—always the redbreast—and the wren, the ringdove, the song-thrush, the willow warbler, the starling at the eaves, the swallow on the chimney-stack; whilst in downs and fields I add, of course, the lark. There are others less assured; the goldcrest, for example, and in September or October the pied wag tail. The song-thrush is not, like the redbreast, in the magic of the morn in all twelve months of an English year. He leaves out two at least; and when towards the close of September he starts again with a little string of loose and unphrased notes, he chooses, I think, not the grey of morning but the full light of a mellow day.

CHAPTER II

CORBIES

I

"THE Twa Corbies" is one of the truly wonderful songs in English literature, a thing all genius—but it is not kind to my old friend the carrion crow. The corbies find a noble knight who lies new-slain in a ditch. Only his hound, and his hawk, and his lady know he is there; and his hound has gone hunting, his hawk is after the wild fowl, and his lady has found another mate. So, says one of the corbies to the other, let us make our dinner sweet—

> "Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,
> And I'll pick out his bonny blue een:
> Wi' ae lock o' his gowden hair
> We'll theek our nest when it grows bare."

There we have the carrion crow's harsh reputation. Many things have gone to give him the ill character he bears and always will—his blue-black dress for one thing, his wicked-looking beak for another. There is his croak, too, to tell against him, hoarse and abysmal beyond that of any other English

bird. The rook is "mellow music when compared with him"; the rook, indeed, can at seasons sing and croon softly, whilst there is a certain grandeur, and a weirdness, about the note of the raven, the bird of Odin, which is wanting in the crow.

Besides the fancy, there is fact against the crow. Seen from the gamekeeper's and the game-preserver's standpoint, a crow is the blackest sinner of all. A good word can be found for the peregrine, an excuse at least for such a swift and glorious raider, and to-day even the sparrowhawk has found a few friends in the least likely quarters. But I never heard a kind word spoken of the carrion crow. Few dare—or care, perhaps—to propose him for the protected list. Nobody denies that he robs a hen roost when the chance offers, or that he is the proven foe of all young game birds, or that he hunts at times for the eggs of pheasant and partridge on something like a system. In truth, no one who knows the life of the carrion crow in or near a game covert, or near a poultry run, could deny these habits. They are too well known to us all. The crow is a robber and a raider beyond question in some country places. He is a bird of prey—though, when one comes to think of that, so is the redbreast or the song-thrush.

The crow is all things that they say, but he is a great deal more than they say; and it is because he is so much more that I have dared and dare again to speak a work for him. All these corbies have strong

character—none, I believe, stronger than the carrion crow. The jay, a cousin to the corbies, is artful and cautious if noisy and flustering in his caution ; and the daw is canny too. But an old carrion crow which has outlived a stricken band of colleagues—for the crow is by no means always a solitary or unsociable bird—can develop a wariness that seems more than corvine.

There was a crow I knew about that had contrived to outlive a band which foraged and nested and roosted in a thick wood. There was matched against him one who warred restlessly against vermin with gun and trap and a small phial with a staring red label. Yet, when all his companions or rivals had been accounted for, this bird lived on and was often heard calling at dawn and again at dusk for a mate who did not come. He lived on, and ere the end—if, indeed, that long life is ended now—a mate did come to this super-crow, and there was once more a nest in April.

It is partly because, as a boy, I put my finger into so many crows' nests in April and early May, in oaks and once or twice in a yew-tree on the beech hanger, that I have a good word for the bird. A crow's nest is quite a beautiful thing to see and touch. The stories about the crow patching up another bird's old nest are ill told, I think. All the crows' nests I have seen have been new nests of the year, well made and finely furnished. The crow is

no sloven builder, and the cup within is smooth and cosy.

There is a feature in the flight of the crow which is common to all these corbies that I have in thought —carrion and grey or hooded crows, raven, rook, and daw. Each has a most untidy, ragged-looking wing, with the tips of the rowing feathers or primaries turned up when in action. The effect oddly reminds me of a sleeper who has passed an ill night, tossing from side to side, so that when he wakes in the morning he finds his hair turned up at the edges so stiffly as to defy the brush and comb that day. I noticed this feature in the carrion crow first, but later I found it common to rooks and daws. It is just the same with the raven, as I learnt on watching the bird in Sicily and in Switzerland.

Another feature common to them all is the gap between the tips of these rowing feathers of the wing. It can be seen without field-glasses even, at a considerable distance. About the corbie's wing is none of that fine and even edge that is so beautiful in the wings of many sea-birds. Yet the crow, carrion or grey, is no mean performer on the wing. I have watched carrion crows now for years about the reaches of the Thames at Chelsea, and for several years there was a pair that often aped the feeding habits of the blackheaded and herring gulls. One winter a grey crow appeared in Chelsea and fed on the shore at low tide between the bridges, but I never

saw him hovering and swooping like the others, and I have not seen him at all of late years. The watchful carrion crows would sweep out from the little wooden pier opposite the Royal Hospital Gardens, hover in the air for a few instants over some scrap of refuse carried down on the swirling tide, and diving down seize and carry it off to the Battersea shore, though chased and struck at by the gulls. Sometimes the crow would miss his aim, and the whole feat suggested a certain ludicrous discomfiture, as if he were afraid of falling in the water and being sucked under. What is grace in a gull is grotesque in a crow. Still, the adventure, however clumsy, often succeeded. It succeeded, too, with the starlings, which aped the gulls in the same way and to still better effect.

For a year or two I missed these Chelsea crows from the shore between the bridges and the Hospital Gardens, but they then reappeared, or others took their places; and, indeed, this wild thing of wild places has become a regular London bird. I meet with it at various places in or just without the town. For several months one winter I walked from Richmond to Ham once or twice in each week, and passing through the little oak wood by Ham House and the fields beyond I nearly always saw or heard a pair of carrion crows which lived there. The antics of the carrion crow in mild weather in January and February are one of the most extraordinary bird exhibitions. When the crow falls in love he acts as the rook

and the pigeon act : he takes to bowing. He is quite content, when this mood is on him, to sit all alone on a dead branch of an oak or plane-tree, and bow and "karr" for ten minutes or longer at a stretch.

I have often watched this strange display of the melting mood, but I must tell again* of a bizarre version of it I saw in the oak wood by Ham House. A crow sat on a blasted limb of an old tree and bowed low and karred his hoarsest—three or four karrs, three or four low bows, then a pause, then the whole grotesque business afresh. A tramp slouched by with his hands in his tattered clothes, a picture of bitterness and destitution—the outcast complete. He heard and saw the crow, and seemed to think the croak a reproach aimed at himself, for he stopped for a minute or so, and looking up at the bird mimicked it till he tired. Then he slouched on his way again, but the crow was still bowing and karring when I left the wood. The carrion crow has sometimes struck me as a sort of Quilp among birds, though here perhaps Quilp was the tramp. The whole scene remains fresh in my mind. How well it would have suited one of those little woodcuts at the end of a chapter in which a lost English art excelled !

* "The Airy Way," p. 208.

II

The crow was a familiar of mine in days when a rook was a far-off rarity. I never climbed up to a rook's nest in boyhood, and in boyhood the nest is the greater part of a bird. Even to this day I have not looked down into a rook's nest nor handled the warm eggs. Rooks scarcely began for me till I was given a gun and a pocketful of cartridges and turned loose in an old park in May with leave to shoot. I not only shot on that wonderful day, but, marvel of marvels, I shot flying. What a preposterous dream the dead past is, an adventure like this seems to prove. Were I put to it to prove that I shot rooks on that day in that old park I could not produce an atom of evidence worth considering. The house, for one thing, is clean gone—it was burnt. All the people are gone—they are dead, I think. The group of old elms under which I was posted by the old gentleman who played croquet so well—three hoops sometimes at a break, especially the two in the "lady's mile"—these are gone, too, I believe. The evidence, indeed, has all been so tampered with by time that I begin to be rather shaken myself when I recall the incident.

After that reality or dream of rooks I again lost sight largely of the birds, and it was not till about nine years ago, when I lived part of the year close to a large rookery, that I settled down to watch them

in earnest. There I found myself at all times of the year in the midst of the rooks. The great thing at first was to walk down the village just before dusk and be present at their evening prayers, as the little girl described it to White at Selborne. In the evening service of rooks during the spring and summer—I dare say through the whole year, though I often missed them from the rookery trees in the winter—the jackdaws answer to cheeky, irreverent village boys. The pert note of the daw is quite out of keeping with the solemn, mysterious rites of the rook at this hour; and yet it serves by contrast to heighten or accent the scene. The sound and scene at the rookery at dusk and just before absolute dark remind me in a way of the scene and sound of the honey bees at this time. It is a dull imagination that is not affected by the bee drama when the workers and the sleek lolling drones are all back under cover for the night, and the whole hive sings itself to rest—if the worker bee in its feverish heat can be said ever really to rest from the first days of pollen to the last days of honey. The hive never sounds louder—every bee, it seems, humming with excitement—than when the city is full at the end of the spring or summer day. Touch the top of the hive no matter how lightly, raise the roof, no matter how gently, half an inch or less, and the hum is instantly an uproar. The whole packed city simmers and seethes.

It is the same with the rooks. For half an hour or more, when all the inhabitants are back from the fields, the whole city is thrown into a high fever of excitement. It is with the rooks, then, as with the starlings at dusk now—every bird takes part in the extraordinary continuous chorus. All the old rooks are exclaiming, expostulating, protesting; all the young rooks which are able to utter a sound are uttering it without ceasing; every jackdaw is cutting in. But the city of the rooks is not only like that of the bees at dusk in a ferment of sound; it can no more keep still than it can keep silent. The whole rookery, whether disturbed or not by human intrusion, is always being swept off the trees into the air, where the turmoil will be redoubled. I used to go down to the rookery in the high elms and beeches eve after eve to watch this scene, for the fascination of it grew on me. It differs from the evening service of the bees and of the starlings very notably in this: the hum of the bees and the sing-song or murmur of the starlings is a monotony, the sound uttered by one bee appearing to be identical with that uttered by another bee, and so, too, with the starlings; whereas there is a variety of notes uttered by the rooks.

A language of rooks is really no fantastic idea. I think very little of the stories about rooks having to themselves a code and a high court. When I believe that, I shall believe too there are aristocrats and democrats in the rookery, socialists and individ-

ualists, or that when a party goes off to nest in a tree or group of trees a little apart from the main body it has carried rook home-rule. Such stories are the result, perhaps, of not watching rooks. But the language of rooks is quite another thing. Standing under a great rookery at dusk, the swishing of wings all round us, the clang of hundreds of tongues resounding through the calm evening air, we cannot, and need not, resist the idea that a great deal is going on here which we know absolutely nothing about.

I know that watching it time after time in those great hours of full summer, serene and scented hours, with a lull over everything around save these agitated birds, I am always impressed by the feeling that there is much about rooks which we know nothing of. These are not merely the random cries of creatures excited about nothing. The scene is common to every rookery. It has been repeated eve after eve for hundreds and thousands of years. Nature is not fond of mere senseless muddle and confusion where there is no need in the world for confusion. The rookery uproar at dusk must be an important drama, a thing of meaning; and I believe there is something like a cosmos in all this seeming chaos of "caws" and "cawks." Only we cannot translate the language; we do not know the grammar of it; we have not the vocabulary; we cannot guess even at the alphabet.

That is one of the three distinctive scenes in the life of this strange and passionate and brainy bird which interest me. Another scene relates to courting and nest-making. The courting business has already begun. So early as the third week of January, before the snipe is drumming or the peewit tumbling, whilst the breast of the cock chaffinch is as yet scarcely rose-tinted, the rook's fancy has lightly turned to thoughts of love. I hear a kind of falsetto cawk in the elm, look up through the wretched drizzle, and see two pairs of rooks wooing. The birds sit as near each other as they possibly can—as close as roosting ring-doves sit—though the twig rocks uncomfortably beneath the burden.

The male makes a kind of obeisance to his partner, and as he does so his tail goes up and opens like a fan. He raises his voice and it breaks.

Then both pairs fly off in ecstasy, with an unattached rook keeping them close company, to some trees where nests have often been built. It may remind one of William Blake's little song of the nesting birds:

> "Come! on wings of joy we'll fly
> To where my bower is hung on high."

So all through February that delicate flutter and tail-play will last, the male sitting on a twig close to the nest, and declaring his rapture while his partner piles stick on stick or fetches soft lining.

The gallantry is not always mere show, a bow and a tail turned into a sprightly fan, with a high-pitched accent of adoration. It takes a much more practical shape when in the grass-fields the male bird digs up a grub, such as the "leather jacket," and, straddling towards his partner, puts it into her bill. She stands sweetly expectant, quivering with emotion at his approach, and uttering little notes of pleasure. Her fancy lightly turns to thoughts of food.

The third of these distinctive scenes in the world of rooks is one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen whilst watching birds, though it has not that strange mystery and fascination which hold one under the rookery at roosting-time in summer. The scene I mean is when in the autumn or winter morning, after perhaps a period of mist that has at length lifted, the whole rookery takes the air. It has hung about its city for hours, it may be, undecided on its plans for the day. But now, as the mist melts and the sun shines out brightly, the rooks with loud clangour sweep into the skies, and here, before they settle finally on their route and feeding-ground for the rest of the morning or day, they spire and coil and cut and glide and tumble in the air with a grace that many of us never imagined in rooks. They bathe in the sunshine, they exult in the exercise.

So, very slowly, they sweep away from their city in immense loops and circles, some of them moving stately and slow, others darting swift as a falcon in

and out among their sedater fellows—these swift ones being rooks at frolic.

The whole scene* is one of enchanting beauty. The aerial curves of the birds and the play of light and shade on them as they sweep round and round, and often up and up, are wonderful to see. It is a revelation in rooks. They melt away at length in the distance, and the last sound of them dies on the ear

I have under, not over, rated the beauty and grace of rooks, and I am quite unable to give any notion of the peculiar charm of their multitudinous music, but I can understand what a spell it exercises over those who have passed their youth under a rookery.

* This scene is described in "The Airy Way," p. 191, as I saw it one autumn day at Oakley.

CHAPTER III

THE CORBIES' LITTLE BROTHER

MY title may get me into disrepute, for has there not been an indignant outcry of late against the "humanizing" of birds and beasts? Has not Mr. Roosevelt raised his voice against the habit? Mr. Roosevelt is very fond of birds. He has watched them closely in his own country, and can speak and write of them, and of many forms of wild life, with loving authority. Mr. Roosevelt is an intimate of wild life. Those who have been in touch with him, however slight or distant, over such things know how he throws into them a pure enthusiasm: the boy in him is father of the man. But I had rather not march off the humanizers, whoever they be, to stern justice till I know exactly how they have broken the law—and what the law is. Besides, I have humanized birds and brutes too often myself to join in the outcry. The lines from the little Scottish poem humanized birds, I suppose. It humanized the "Twa Corbies" who discussed to one another what should be done with the knight who lay slain in the ditch; and I suspect if we searched English literature we should find that

many of the best things in it about birds and beasts humanize wild life.

The old, inhuman way was to shoot the bird and then label it with a very long name, such as gave Waterton the jaw-ache, and to describe how many times it has been "obtained"—a euphemism for destroyed—in such and such a place. That is the way of a generation which liked to have its birds in a glass case, and I cannot help thinking that by crying out against the humanizing of wild life we are inviting a reaction.

Humanizing birds or beasts or butterflies is quite safe and sound—we have only to humanize them *right*. It is true one corbie never said to another, in corbie speech or in human: "Here is a slain warrior in a ditch whom nobody knows of save his faithless hound and hawk and lady; let us go and feast on him and pluck out his golden hair to warm our nest with." Yet how truly and finely is that bit of humanizing done and how excellent the effect! It is worth volumes of Latin names and classifications, and will live long after they are all dead and forgotten.

As to corbies, anyhow, it would be hardly possible to write of them with any sympathy, yet not humanize them. One must humanize the jackdaw from the very start. He is a rook's little brother. No one can doubt this who has watched for any time the intimate relations between the two birds. I wrote of him once as a kind of privileged parasite of the

rookery, but I withdraw "parasite." It is altogether too harsh a word. The jackdaw lives with rooks, by no means on them.

He nests well under the rookery, in the holes and hollows which rooks have no use for. He sallies out with them in the morning, perhaps, though I think he does not commonly feed in their company; in the incessant trivial bickerings among the rooks which go on in a field full of food I have never seen the jackdaw engage—he has perhaps too much respect for his big brothers to care to dine with them. But he often returns home in the winter afternoon in the last rook train. That long, black, musical train of rooks wending home just before dusk to their roosting trees is one of the most charming sights of the winter day in English countryside; and as we mark it week by week, starting a little later as the days grow longer, our thoughts begin to be spring thoughts.

The jackdaws take the train on its route, and join in the music of caw and quarr. Howard Saunders, in his "Manual of British Birds," gave the note of the jackdaws—"wrangling daws," Tennyson called them—as "cae," which is as near as one can get to it. But though this is the distinctive cry of the bird as he travels in the last rook train, and later joins in the evening hymn at the rookery, he has more notes than one. The jackdaw is a conversationist—a brilliant one, I should say, compared to such dull little talkers as most of the buntings or pipits, or the

spotted flycatcher, which can hardly improve on the squeak of a bat.

I knew of a party of jackdaws, a dozen or a score of them, that were so talkative very early in the morning that they became intolerable to the other people in the house. They were settled in a stack or two of chimneys in a lonely house, which they littered with their sticks at nesting-time. They woke long before the house-sparrow—whose little redeeming-point is that he wakes late—and they jabbered and crooned to one another long before light. These birds seemed to have taken the house on a long lease. They throve and no doubt threw out colonies to other houses in the neighbourhood, or perhaps to two or three of the rookeries a few miles off. It was pleasant to watch them at sport in the skies in the sunshine of a clear winter day ere they set out in earnest to their feeding-grounds. They toyed and trifled with one another in pairs, and played the game of aerial chase, catch as catch can, as it is played among romping rooks.

In the spring the male jackdaw pays delicate attention to the female of his choice. She responds prettily, and in the elms just beginning to turn green the love business goes forward with spirit. I have not seen affection take the form of food, as it so often does with the rook, but I suspect the jackdaw sometimes digs up a grub and offers it to his mate. He might even offer her an egg, say a missel-thrush's egg in

March, though this would be putting his gallantry to a great strain—an egg being to any of these corbies or their cousins, the pies and jays, the delicacy of delicacies. I should not be at all surprised to learn that the carrion crow or the hoodie digs up dainties for his partner in much the same way as the rook, and that the raven has a like habit. These customs are often general throughout a family or group of birds.

There are not gallant and ungallant rooks, egoist and altruist rooks. If we say there are, we humanize rooks all wrong, and Mr. Roosevelt is justified in handing us over to the beaks. In treating of a bird —a true wild bird—we are treating of it not individually but collectively. Despite that iron rule in wild life of the survival of the fittest—the "Get-on or Get-out" rule which an American took for his office motto and framed on the wall—there is little sign of individualism in birds or beasts or butterflies.

Roughly, one rook is as another rook, this jackdaw the same as that jackdaw; or, if otherwise, the differences in character between them are on a scale too minute for human ken.

As an example of how these habits run through a family: I read long ago that ravens in the courting and nesting-time will fly out a little way from their rock or cliff side and purposely lose their balance, turning a kind of grotesque somersault in the air. One day I saw a raven perform this feat by Monte

Pellegrino, and I saw a crow do it likewise. It is a common corbie custom, I dare say, a love blandishment.

The jackdaw must have the social life. A carrion crow can live as a solitary, though I question whether he ever does so from choice, for where crows are abundant they gather in roosting companies at about dusk in winter, and seem to enjoy half an hour's aerial exercise and conversation somewhat in the rook way. I believe that the raven, too, king of corbies, is no recluse by nature. But a jackdaw cannot live in his own company. He seeks not only the society of his fellow, but that of rooks or gulls or men.

The scene which this most restless and flighty of the corbies seems to fit best—and yet fit least—is the iron coast of North Cornwall. As we near the little village of Trevalga, whilst driving or walking from Camelford, the sound of a vast concert of sea-birds floats to us from the Lye Rock and two or three stacks near by. At first, a mile or so away, it is soft and low and very mysterious. We might not guess it came from birds at all but for knowing the sea is near, and that sea the haunt of a myriad of wildfowl all through the nesting-season. This is a scene of excitement that might make the rookery seem phlegmatic. Through May and June the concert, the feverish turmoil, of sea-birds seems not to cease for an hour. Wake up any time in the night and, if the air is still and the coast is near, you will hear the

voices of countless thousands of sleepless creatures. It is the mystic music of the herring gulls that whiten Lye Rock, and the colonies of razorbills and guillemots that people that noble coast in nesting-time.

Here at daytime is a pageant of dreamlike glory, fabulous as Kubla Khan! And here among rocks and skies and waters steeped in colour, the jackdaw is in his element living with gull and sea-parrot the restless life.

CHAPTER IV

COUSINS TO THE CORBIES

FOR feats of the body it is we, not the birds and beasts, who rank as the "lower animals." In running and leaping and swimming, matched against even moderate performers in wild life, a man shapes as one of the awkward squad. Take two out of the many master athletes in Nature, the salmon and the flea, and imagine a contest between, say, the record high jumper in human sports and any flea; or a contest between Webb or Holbein and any salmon. Might not the human athlete look rather ineffective after the result, as viewed by some detached observer in another sphere?

Not only in the robuster feats of action, feats of speed and of endurance, are men absurdly outstripped by wild life; they are worsted still more in all the refinements and delicacies of at least four out of the five physical senses. We are the awkward squad with a vengeance, compared with the mole for hearing, the deer for smelling, the woodcock for touch, the hawk or gull for seeing.

I have had even in London a good example of the eye magic of a bird. Someone had flung down into a

Chelsea street a few morsels of broken food. A black-headed gull, soaring and winding high above by the river, saw these scraps in the slush and came swooping down instantly with three companions as quick and eager as itself, to pick them off the ground. It is the same with the gull as with the falcon. To give the idea of piercing vision, how can one improve on the saying that So-and-so has "the eye of a hawk"?

All human achievement of the body therefore fails utterly against the achievement of wild life. But we turn to matters of the understanding to find the balance out of all comparison the other way. It is wild life that is then seen to be the awkward squad. In body the wild thing is a genius, in mind less than a mediocrist.

It is just possible sometimes to match the man against the bird or beasts in the feats of the body; it is never possible to match the bird or beast against the man in feats of mind.

The corbies and the two cousins of the corbies, jay and magpie, are a good example. I think there is very little doubt this group—raven, crow, rook, jackdaw, jay, and magpie—is on the whole the most knowing of any group of birds in England. House-sparrows are artful and extremely persistent at times, and there is a titmouse intelligence well above the bird level, as all seem to agree who have watched blue tit or ox-eye pull up a string holding a bit of meat. But the corbies are craftier than any of these small birds. Yet

when one has given full credit, and perhaps a little more than credit, to the wisest of the corbies, whichever he be—some may say the rook, others the crow, or magpie—the concession is not a great deal. I do not say that we have plumbed a bird's nature and discovered all that is in it. We have plumbed it indeed very little. We have hardly begun a study of bird speech—a true live language—and we know next to nothing about bird passion and emotion, which are intense and masterful from eagle down to wren. But, so far as we have gone in the study, it really does seem clear that the *thinking* part of bird or beast or butterfly is a small matter.

With these corbies, as with the others, mind mainly takes the form of wariness. How to baffle the foe, how to get a good living by hook or crook, is what the corbies and their cousins concentrate on. Virtually all the feats of mind of a jay and of a magpie are feats to this end. Once this is granted, I willingly will go a long way with those of my friends and readers who in their enthusiasm write to me gravely to claim special character for this corbie or that. There is no doubt that the members of this group are distinguished by strong *character*. Slyness is a feature of the jackdaw and the magpie. It would really seem as though the magpie and the daw had, too, something akin to the sense of humour. The daw has at least a turn for mischief, and mischief can figure as a poor relation of humour. No doubt the mischief is some-

times unconscious. How the daws carried off the plant labels from the Oxford Botanical Gardens is touched on in Howard Saunders's book, and a friend has written to me giving the story in detail. At the spring seeding-time the test seeds were duly sown and neatly labelled with little wooden slips. Next day the labels were all gone. Fresh ones were put in, but these, too, mysteriously disappeared. Then a watch was kept and the police were called in. But a policeman is no match for a jackdaw. No arrest was made, and for some months the thieves were undiscovered. Later in the year some visitors went up into the tower of Merton, and, behold, the missing labels! Hundreds littered the steps near the roof, and on the top of the labels were jackdaw nests. The birds had drawn heavily on the Botanical Gardens' supply, in early morning perhaps when the policeman dozed at his post; and, as they built, the smooth bits of wood had slid down, till at length there was a firm foundation on which the daws reared their nests.

The broad American humourist seems to have been wiser than he knew when he wrote of the nest-building blue jay which set to work to drop acorns into a hole in a roof till all the blue jays in the neighbourhood crowded to the scene to watch and gaffaw at a fool trying to fill up a house.

But intense slyness is more the feature of the wild jackdaw than a spirit of mischief. I have seen him haunt a spot where a pair of missel-thrushes had a nest,

and it was hard to resist the idea that he watched them and awaited his chance, whilst they, by harsh cries of wrath and alarm, showed they knew he was hanging about to get the eggs if they left the nest for a short time. In the end the eggs were taken and the nest ruffled and spoilt.*

The jay and the magpie are egg thieves, I should say, quite as hardy and as artful as the daw. But the jay joins to his slyness a kind of ludicrous caution. Surprised in his nest-making or his egging forays or in his amours, he can never slip off steathily. He raises his voice to a loud shriek. A jay appears in a perpetual panic. The slightest step in the woodland sets him going. Safety for a jay can only be assured by sound, and every shriek sets every other jay in the neighbourhood shrieking in unison. How the poacher, croaching and crawling through the brakes with his wires or nets and ferret, must dread that tearing cry! And how swiftly all the wild life around takes the warning—up goes the head of the nibbling rabbit, the ring-dove smartly claps a wing and is off, the blackbirds are all chinking.

I *cannot* believe in birds *setting* sentinels; that is humanizing them all wrong; I do know, through watching him for years, that every jay is born a sentinel.

The corbie cousins are master builders. Those prickles which the magpie works into the outside of

* "The Birds in our Wood," p. 9.

her nest are worth inquiring into. Can she really know the nature of a prickle and use it for an armour? Or does she only use the thorny sticks because they make good binding stuff to hold the large domed nest together?

I remember the first magpie's nest in a high oak which I climbed to as a boy. Out of years all blurred and illusive that great adventure comes back so strangely fresh and distinct! After all, childhood, enchanted or not, *may* have been—such flashes of reality point to the thing. In those days one never doubted that the magpie used the prickles for defence and the hand was thrust very delicately into the nest. But years bring the philosophic doubt. If she does fend with these prickles the roses of her life, knowing their nature, this argues a discretion I have scarcely reckoned with. It reminds me of a bit of folk-lore which, in childhood, I had from the villagers: that the nightingale, to keep awake at night and singing to his mate, sets his breast against a thorn. This more than humanized, it spiritualized, the nightingale.

The jay's nest is quite unlike the magpie's. It has not the thorny walls without or the firm clay floor within, but none the less it is a lovely bit of work. I have found hundreds of jays' nests, some in ivied oaks or on the trunks of scrubby trees, others in white or black thorn or low firs, but most in the stems of birches wearing that vivid fresh green of early May

in the deep woodlands. Whether the jay lines with rootlets almost hair fine or with thin twigs of dead wood, the cup within is in its perfect shape and smoothness a work of natural art not surpassed by many things we find in a world all wonders in design. In 1911 I found one again after many years, and watched it growing from day to day till the last delicate root was weaved into the lining. Unlike the magpie and all the English corbies, the jay is secretive in her nest site, choosing, where she can, the inner depths of woodlands.

It is in these thickets that the jays gather for courtship in early May. All the corbies are droll in courtship, but the jay I think the chief comedian of them. What a fluster of wings and tails, raising of the crests, helter-skelter pursuit of two or three females by a dozen males, and all the while a gabble which ceases not for a moment till the choice is made! How that choice is reached among courting corbies such as jays, the males of which do not fight but merely fluster, I never could determine. One jay is so exactly like another! The jay crest, the jay wing pattern, the jay eye, the jay voice—how is it possible to judge between bird and bird in such things? Yet the female must discriminate by some standard of jay perfection too subtle altogether for our understanding.

This is where Evolution fails us. Evolution is great and prevails, but it cannot teach us to see with the eye of a jay.

CHAPTER V

HINTS OF SPRING

THE harsh words the ancients spoke of winter were after all not so ill chosen. "Black" and "horrid" may no longer be used in poetry to describe the season, and winter ceased "to reign tremendous o'er the year" when Thomson's or Erasmus Darwin's adjectival school of verse ended. About the same time our forefathers ceased to represent the South Downs as "a vast range," though Cobbett did a little later write of Hawkley Hanger as a kind of "wonder of the world." But the change is hardly more than a change in word fashion. Our feeling about winter is very much the feeling of people in Thomson's day, or even in the world of the ancients. The natural human dislike of winter is well shown in the effect which the first hints of spring have on nearly all of us. These hints and early signs are among the most delicious experiences in life. The keenness of the appetite for spring never loses edge. Later in the season, after the thing has been actually realized, the edge grows blunter; but at the beginning, with days perceptibly lengthening, it is like the hunger of returning health.

The last part of winter is a sick part. The opening part of winter is quite different; that, indeed, is often a sort of cure for the sickness of autumn. The first pinch which fetches down soaked, worn-out leaves, and ends plant life that has outlasted its time, is quite welcome. That is often felt to be the winter of health. We feel this especially in wooded spots, where the first sharp night frost leads to a bright and keen morning. The trees and the whole scene then wear that *clean* look of health and vigour which is a feature of early winter in England. Often I have noticed this whilst passing through the New Forest, and been impressed by it.

But the waning winter is a world removed from the waxing winter. "Horrid" and "black," and every term of reproach and shrinking which the old world heaped upon the season are often well deserved. It is, like the winter of man in Keat's sonnet, a "pale misfeature." The waning end of winter is an illness; and this whether it takes the form of east and north wind, raw rain, and clammy air, or leaden skies.

The supreme cure and the overmastering hope and wish are in spring, so that every small hint or earnest that the season is really changing at this time is very good. The wonderful thing about all these small signs of a certain change is their absolute newness every year in February and March in England. We perhaps noticed all of them, or most of them, last year and the year before, and any year since early child-

hood, yet next year it will be exactly as if one were seeing them for the first time. It is clearly impossible for a single one of them ever to stale through constant use. Its freshness even seems to grow a little—something being subtly added to it with each added year.

It is all a mistake to imagine that this change begins only decidedly towards the close of March or even is delayed till the time of swallows. It always begins most distinctly in February. The lengthening of daylight is the prime sign, absolute and conclusive, of the approaching end of the sick part of winter—I mean that notable lengthening of light which comes about the middle of February. Light and life, I have said, are synonyms: more of one means more of the other. We need not search behind this to explain why every human being to whom life is worth anything finds some good in lengthening days at this time of year.

But the last week or so of February is marked in most years by many of the lesser signs of the change in the season. To find them one need not search in sheltered or favoured spots. Go up among byroads and lanes in quite a high-lying country in the south of England, in a country of large cornfields and fallows with little shelter away from the elmy villages except clipped thorn hedges, with here and there to break the force of the wind a planted clump of beeches or pines and firs—and undoubted hints of spring are everywhere. It wants not more than a mild morning

and afternoon, with three or four hours of weak sunshine, to bring out the sulphur butterfly. March is this sulphur's real month for arousing in earnest, the first mild day of sunshine bringing out the butterflies then by hundreds. I believe it would be impossible on such a day to miss finding many sulphurs on the wing among the hollies and oaks of Sway and Setthorns in the New Forest. But I often see this butterfly out in quite high and unsheltered districts elsewhere a fortnight earlier.

In the third week of February one season I met with one at fully five hundred feet above the sea, and it was strong in flight and lovely in colour as any new hatched sulphur of late summer. This was a male very beautiful in colour, and it struck me as a most natural mistake people not learned in these things make when they imagine that these February and March butterflies are fresh from the chrysalid. Wherever the sulphur sleeps through the late autumn and winter its quarters must be perfectly secure: this particular sulphur could not have been fresher and brighter in tint when it hatched in August or September—it was a bright canary yellow. I saw a few days later in the South of Europe, and again on the coast of Africa, Cleopatra, the southern cousin of this sulphur. Cleopatra is one of the examples which Professor Bateson discussed in his lectures on Evolution, and on the little help the theory gives us when we try to account for the

minute set differences between species in the main so extremely like one another. I find that a year or so since I took this example myself in the same matter, and asked what could there be in the laws of natural selection to explain the rich orange on the wings of Cleopatra, the southern sulphur butterfly, and the lack of it on the wings of Rhamni, our English insect? I did not, however, mention this curious fact—that sometimes our sulphur does, in its varieties or freaks, develop streaks or strains of Cleopatra orange. But it ends at that. The colour born in mystery fades out in mystery; and thereafter, for every English sulphur born with something of the orange glow of Cleopatra, a million English sulphur butterflies, I suppose, are born plain Rhamni—canary yellow in the male and much paler greenish yellow in the female, with one small spot of saffron on each wing.

I must say that these minute differences in things so nearly alike—minute, yet probably tremendous in significance—do not seem to me to bring Evolution or Natural Selection, its agent, into discredit: only they often suggest to me that some other unknown agency may have been helping in the work of species making.

My sulphur in the hills was a solitary. It passed down the road, and I saw no more butterfly life. Yet I found that hours of that day belonged wholly to spring. Far too many larks sang between twelve

and two for any winter afternoon. In May the whole sky in this place of large cornfields and sparse hedges seems packed with larks. The air on some days brims with their song absolutely continuous for hours together; though, as we know, a single lark can keep it up only for a minute or so at a stretch. February has nothing like that but still, every time I stopped to attend, there was a lark or two shrilling overhead. Wherever there were village or farmyard elms and other trees, the thrushes and missel-thrushes were singing.

The hedge-sparrows, some of them so tame that I could walk within a yard or two and not alarm them, were singing snatches in most of the hedges, and the yellowhammers were in something like full song—if the rather mincing music of the yellowhammer can ever be called full. Spring is not notably suggested by the song of either of the thrushes, it is true, whilst the hedge-sparrow nearly always begins to sing about the turn of the year. But spring is suggested by the bulk of song among these birds and by the improving quality of the music.

CHAPTER VI

THE PERFECT THING

CAN perfection be more fitly expressed than in terms of a bird's-nest? True, there are some nests at this season in which it could not well be defined. Nothing, for example, could be much remoter from perfection than the nest of several of the titmice —though, oddly, the nest of one member of that family, the long-tailed titmouse, is the loveliest found in England. There is the house-sparrow, too, which can hardly be said to build at all, but gathers carelessly and heaps into some hole or corner of brickwork a mass of rubbish. When the house-sparrow builds in a tree, it may give a very distant sign of skill in building, skill of the prehistoric sort, such as men had in the Stone Age. It is not, however, because it uses rubbish in building that the sparrow fails to express perfection—far from it. One can safely say that the matter worked in by all the nest-builders of high skill is rubbish. A bird's-nest is made of odds and ends, many of them faded, shrivelled, rotten; things spent and cast and worthless. Nothing is used that by any effort of imagination could be termed precious. I doubt if, setting aside feathers for lining,

things are used often or ever, in England at least, which can be rightly termed ornamental or beautiful.

The nearest approach to beauty in the building stuff of an English bird is the fruithead of moss, which the chaffinch sometimes lines her nest with, and the scraps of grey lichen with which she very often, and the long-tailed titmouse I think always, mats the outside. But these fragments are scarcely in themselves things of striking beauty either on the chaffinch or on the titmouse nest, and I imagine the same is true of most or all of the lovely nests of humming birds.

Out of rubbish, then, the bird contrives perfection. It is perfection in many forms, one of which I came upon for the first time, or at least noticed closely for the first time, in April. I felt sure a pair of grey wagtails had chosen an old mill for their nesting-place, for just before twilight I saw by chance a pair slip by me with that bounding flight of wagtails—the flight that may be likened to long, smooth rollers, undulating flight—and disappear through the decayed wood or wall. Certain actions of birds at this season declare quite unmistakably a nest in making, or a nest with eggs or young. I knew instantly that a grey wagtail's nest was to be, or already was, in this spot, and a week later I set about to find exactly where. But it was not to be found at once. The only nests which I found at first on or in the mill were two song-nests of the wren. One of these was inside

the mill, near the top of the wheel, and inside a last year's swallow's nest. The wren, a cock bird doubtless, had not tried to dress up the hard-caked mud of the swallow's nest, but had contented himself with adding to it a cover or roof of moss and twisted bents. I must admit the effect of this was odd, almost ridiculous—that wren had not expressed himself perfectly.

The same bird—I doubt not it was the same—had done better in another song-nest he had pressed against the ivied wooden wall outside the mill shed; for here he had worked up his materials of moss and bents to the usual pitch of wren perfection in the doorway or entrance. The firmness and hardness of that door were—as usual with the doors of the wren—a kind of marvel; it could stand weeks of ill weather and not give. You can put two fingers into the firm-knit nest of the wren, where the building stuff is moss and bents, without risk of spoiling it.

I call these "song-nests" because they are built—and, commonly, after the building has reached a certain point, abandoned—by cock wrens that through March and April are constantly brimming over with song. Outside the nest, on twigs almost touching it, on the doorway of the nest, and probably right inside the nest at times before the roof is done, the cock wren sings amidst his labours. I know nothing like it in the world of birds, though I dare say there is the same thing among other races of the wren in other countries.

The great majority of these song-nests are never business nests—never completed, never even lined with the inner bedding of feather or moss. For every wren's nest found in early April or in March with eggs, one will, on searching, find half a dozen nests that have not and never will have eggs. It is very easy to find these song-nests of the wren. One has only to mark the bird in song, then search about a little in sheds or ivied walls or masses of dead bracken or bramble and find a nest or two.

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In rather a dark corner of the mill shed, on a narrow shelf of bricks, four inches of which jut out from the wall, lay a little heap of moss. At this spot a few trailers of ivy had come *indoors* from the light, after the curious habit of ivy, which sometimes seems as willing to leave the light as to seek it; the trailers sprawl over and below the moss heap which I took for the old nest of a mouse or rat. Five feet or so beneath, in the channel walled off from the mill-wheel's channel, there is the constant rush and roar of water, for the wheel no longer works. Chancing, whilst I climbed about the rotting walls inside the shed, to come quite close to this spot I saw, to my surprise, that this bit of moss was a bird's-nest and on it a grey wagtail was warming her eggs. She sat so close it seemed as if one might put one's hand upon her.

What a perfect thing was here, quite apart from

the making of the nest! I dare say that by a time exposure I might have got a kind of picture of the nest and the bird on her eggs, for, within a few feet, was a wall to place the kodak on, and she gave no sign of stirring whilst I stood or knelt within little more than a yard of her. But there was that in the scene which no film could truly reproduce! She lay low in the cup, her back almost flush with the rim of it. Her body and head, even her wide-open and watching eye, were quite motionless.

Her tail stirred slightly. It was tilted up above the rim of the nest at an angle perhaps of forty, and its narrow and clearly defined white edging along the outside feathers on either side was very distinct—indeed, the first I saw of the bird was this long up-tilted tail. I have sometimes wondered whether the tail of a wagtail *can* be absolutely still. It moves on springs so extremely sensitive that the slightest movement of any part of the bird must set them going. Here the bird was at absolute rest, and the upper end, the body end, of the tail was rested on the nest. Yet the last inch or so of tail was stirring palpably, if ever so slightly!

Some faint movement in the still air at this sheltered spot may have stirred it, or perhaps the fine vibration of the wall—unregistered by my sense—through the rush of the water underneath.

When at length she did move, she slipped off her nest so lightly as surely not to disturb the set of one

fine hair therein. She seemed up and away with one action of grace and of supreme ease. A long wave or two of streaming flight took her from the nest between the ivy trailers and the wall to the other end of the shed, whence she turned through the open door into the fields; and that without doubt is her unvarying path through the air from out of doors to her nest and the reverse.

She went without a moment's faltering or confusion; and along the same route she would return a little later when I left the spot, and along the same route in a month or so she will lead out her young. Some birds in an enclosed place like this will bungle on the wing. But the swallows, knowing the aerial roadways so well, are never at an instant's loss, and the grey wagtail is as much at home in such a spot as the swallow.

After she had sped away light and quiet as a shadow of a bird, I looked down into the nest and saw its four eggs. They lay in a cup that had all the smoothness and the symmetry which are such a lovely feature of a bird's-nest.

I had stood and watched not long before a potter at the wheel, working at a spot where a potter with the same material had been working, they told me, for two thousand years at least. It was a fascinating thing to see; for working merely with his simple wheel and some scrap of stick, he made out of mud-rubbish forms with curves and whole shape unerring as

anything moulded by the most complex machine. In all the art that has grown from the time of Greece, one could find nothing truer and purer than these curves and ovals. They were at the beginning of kallæsthetics, and will be there till the close. Now, the grey wagtail, without the scrap of stick, yet worked as truly and as surely, and curved and shaped her nest as perfectly, as the potter his vessels. What is far more wonderful, she worked with that which to human touch and management feels the least promising of materials.

The art of the swallow, which cements its nest to the woodwork above, is another thing than that of the wagtail. The swallow at least has, like the potter, a plastic stuff to create from, where the wagtail has, if she is to secure a perfect round or oval and an unerring curve, to all appearance the contrary. But, thinking the matter over, one sees that the wagtail has a wheel for her work, though it does not revolve like the potter's. It is the wheel of her breast.

CHAPTER VII

"SMALL, BUT A WORK DIVINE"

THERE is a passage in Sir Thomas Browne I have touched on more than once, but must touch on once again, for I think it holds a small philosophy of Nature. I mean the passage in which Browne argues that human reason may well go to school to the wisdom of bees and ants and spiders. Let ruder heads be amazed by whales and prodigious creatures, says he: "these, I confess, are the colossus and majestic pieces of her [Nature's] hand." But the narrow engines, he continues, offer more curious mathematics—Regio Montanus's Fly being more admirable than his eagle. Certainly it is often true that the smaller the natural engine in the world of flower or bird or insect one looks into at this time of year the larger the wonder of it seems and the rarer and more curious the beauty. The less includes the greater is a lesson taught by an almost endless variety of the minuter forms of life.

It is a lesson taught us by the whorl and spire of the tiny shells, which can be gathered almost by the handful out of small and clear English streams in summer scarcely less than along the shore of an

African lagoon; taught, too, by the flower and seed mechanisms of miniature plants on the downs; by the humble undersides of many moths' and butterflies' wings; by the whole build and faery beauty of the smallest birds. We must agree there is no need to go for wonder to whales and elephants and dromedaries—though I admit I would give a good deal to see the flap of an elephant's ear, the actual beast in the actual forest, not the excellent imitation of it in a zoological garden.

I have enjoyed watching for a little while three of these narrow engines in Nature, any one of which might have furnished Browne fully for his argument—first my pair of grey wagtails by the edge of the brook, where they nested in the old mill in April; next, the butterfly styled Duke of Burgundy fritillary; third, the gold-crested wren at its nest. The grey wagtails have done with their first brood, and are hunting water-flies and other small insect food all day along the banks of the brook. Perhaps the true home of this lovely little bird—the smartest, sprightliest of all our English kinds, save the redstart—is not in the South, but by the rocky pools and cascades of a Highland mountain stream. But the grey wagtail is commoner than some writers on English birds have thought. Both in summer and winter I find it by the slow, clear, and quiet streams in the South. It cannot well be confused with the yellow or summer wagtail of the water meadows—a common bird in the South and Midlands—because to the sulphur of its

breast is added the bold slate-grey of its mantel and crown. Besides, the male has a black throat. The other yellow-breasted wagtail of the riverside has none of this slate-grey and black.

This grey wagtail, like the common pied wagtail or dishwasher, which everybody knows by sight, is a wading bird; but how deep it dares to wade I only learnt when I saw it in the stream almost up to the breast. Then there happened quite the prettiest incident I have seen in the life of wagtails. The evening sun came strong through the trees and fell full on the shallows where the birds were wading and balancing with that ceaseless up-and-down action of their white-edged tails. At once the two grey wagtails turned to four! Four yellow breasts showed in the glittering stream all close together, and the two just added were every bit as bright and well-defined as the pair they sprang from. It was the effect that Wordsworth gives us in "Yarrow Unvisited."

> "The swan on still St. Mary's Lake
> Float double, swan and shadow!"

But where Wordsworth's picture was in black and white, this one was a thumbnail in colour, exquisite in detail. Every tint, the ruffle and the smooth of plumage that were in the real birds reappeared in the mock birds. Not only this, but the life of the wagtails above was exactly limned in the wagtails below—so that the shade birds below the surface balanced, though upside down!

The Duke of Burgundy is a very small butterfly for such a big name. There is about him little enough of the pomp one associates with such an exalted title. Which Duke, I wonder, was he christened after? Was it Fénélon's pupil, who grew gentle and patient and for whom "the day was ever too short," or Charles the Bold, or which other of the long succession? But I am afraid the christener of this butterfly wanted a sense of humour, for however one views it the name is absurd. Latin names are often worse than English for butterflies; but at least the Duke's classic name, Lucina, is shorter than many, and I prefer it. I met with Lucina on the north slope of the railway embankment. Hitherto this was one of the butterflies I had not succeeded in touching whilst it sunned or sucked sweetmeat on a flower-head. It is nimble and shy. You can disarm some butterflies and moths of their fear by very quiet movements, and end by touching their wings or body, or even having them sometimes on the finger-tip. But Lucina has always left its hazel leaf in haste when I came very close. However, I contrived not only to touch Lucina on the railway slope, but I induced it to come to my finger and cling there.

A cloud passed across the sun, and Lucina fell drowsy, and when I touched it, flitted to my finger-tip, shut its wings tight, and slept. I carried it over to the south side of the embankment, when the sun reappeared, and at once Lucina awoke, spread its wings, and was off. Was ever a thing more quickly

numbed and unnumbed by shade and sun as a butterfly ? It is almost automatic as a spring.

Carrying Lucina over the slope, I could look well into its pattern. Edward Newman, who did not fear to write in human terms of butterflies, and saw in them live things, spoke of these undersides of Lucina's wings as "very beautiful." I can quite agree after scanning this one close. The colour is far from brilliant, just rust-brown, on which are laid spots of white or yellowish-white. But the pattern here is everything, and with Lucina it appears in the form of refined mosaic work, three series of tesseræ, oblong and wedge-shape, set with such curious care.

What do they mean, how and why were they laid there ? I do not think that natural selection or sexual selection solves for us the how or even the why of the undersides of many insect wings; for there is no sign here in Lucina that they are for a guard—guard through invisibility—or for sexual show. Yet this mosaic work must be or have been essential to the life of this insect ; it is repeated in varying and intricate patterns on the wings of many dozens of butterflies outside Lucina's family.

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If the fly Browne writes of is more admirable than the eagle one might say the same of the gold-crested wren in some ways. This bird, the smallest we have in England and the smallest that sings in Europe, is an early nester as a rule. But a pair hatched their

brood in a spruce-tree just outside my garden in Sussex and they were feeding the young in June almost from dusk till dusk. The nest was a good specimen of the goldcrest's art as builder. It was the size of a cricket ball and almost, I should say, a perfect sphere. It hung right under a branch of the spruce with absolutely no prop beneath. Moss, with a few shreds and silky hairs of cocoons and insect webs is all the goldcrest used to make the outside of the nest and swing it securely in the air from the needle leaves of the fir. But it would need a very high and persistent wind to dislodge the nest or young. A chaffinch's will sometimes be blown to the ground, or a goldfinch's, but the goldcrest's is stable because it gives with each stir of the branch it swings from. It allows for the wind with a nice science.

The hen began to feed the brood soon after three each morning; and her mate attended, hurrying out song after song. The spirit of this midget thing, three inches about from tip of beak to the end of the tail, was masterful. He charged with a shrill challenge such small birds as chanced to approach too near the branch that swung the nest. I saw him dart out like a flash at a blue titmouse with an angry cry and drive it off the next branch, and redbreast and finch would be assaulted with equal courage. They were quite harmless, but this bit of the tree was a goldcrest preserve from the time the nest started till the day the young flew.

CHAPTER VIII

PHILOMEL

DID not our ancestors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sometimes know more truth about the natural world than we allow them? Reading delightful old Fuller for the sweetness of his style, I lit on a passage wherein he warns us not to be "over-expecting" happiness in marriage. It is not all romance. Its Olympus has clouds. Sometimes its music must be mute, and for a metaphor he turns to the nightingale. Remember, says he, the nightingales sing only some months in the spring, "but commonly are silent when they have hatched their eggs, as if their mirth were turned into care for their young ones."

I had no notion that this truth about the nightingale was familiar to men in Fuller's generation, but supposed it was first known about the time of Colonel Montagu and Gilbert White. Early in April we always begin to think and talk of nightingales, for they are coming across the sea. I believe in none of the stories of cuckoos calling in English woods in March. The cuckoo knows its season as well as any stork, and that season never begins in

England till April is well in. We might with Wordsworth look a thousand ways for the cuckoo that called in March and never get a glimpse of it: the England of a March cuckoo being indeed "an unsubstantial faery place." But a nightingale in the first week of April I could believe in without great effort, though I never heard one quite so early; whilst a nightingale before the second week is out, I often listen for and have sometimes—if not lately—found.

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Turning over bird-life studies I came upon two or three which I made on a pair of nightingales in June ten years ago. I did not find the nest till the young were hatched, and then I settled down to watch the birds closely. The nest was on the ground among birch stems at the edge of the coppice. It is a strange thing, which I have never been able to explain, that many birds—among them even some of the shyest—prefer the edge of a wood or a woodland path or lane to the thickets within. I watched both the nightingales bringing food for their young, and after a little time I heard the cock bird indulge in several short bursts of song. It was certainly the same bird that had been helping to feed the young in the nest, which proved to me that nightingale song does not of necessity end absolutely at the hatching of the eggs. Virtually, the thing is over by then, but it seems a few bars can be given now and then for

perhaps a few days afterwards. These young had been out of the shells for two days or so, scarcely more.

Why does the nightingale's song end automatically at the hatching of the eggs—little, magic brown eggs in which sleeps "the music of the moon"? It is not the same with many other of the chief and of the lesser singing birds in England. I am sure from long and close watching that most, if not all, of the English "warblers" that are birds of passage like the nightingale, coming to us and leaving us about the same time, often sing after their eggs are hatched. The blackcap notably sings on, so that I always hear him through June, whilst I have heard him at his best in July. The garden warbler likewise sings into July; so do both whitethroats, and I have seen and heard the male lesser whitethroat singing its low delicious undersong in a thick hedge when in company with his mate and full-fledged family.

The willow-wren and the chiff-chaff sing through July, and both, after a pause in August, open anew at the close of summer. The wood warbler sings far into July; but this bird is a very late breeder, and I dare say he has ceased by the time the young are hatched or ready to fly; at least, I have not heard the wood warbler sing at the close of summer or early in autumn like these other two leaf warblers.

But there are many other English birds that sing

on more or less after the hatching of the young, and I am sure that amongst them are plenty which, like the nightingale, rear only one brood in the season. We may safely take it that song does not end automatically with them as it ends with the nightingale. When I first knew of this habit of nightingales, I took on trust the belief that Philomel stops singing that he may not give away the secret of where the young are hid. I do not take it so to-day. That is an example of humanizing a nightingale wrongly; if he ceased to sing from the motive of secrecy, why should he not, instead, choose a singing-place well removed from the nest and young? This might serve his ends still better. But in truth the reason is not one of secrecy at all—otherwise it would begin before the young were hatched, whilst the nest held only one cold egg.

A likelier theory is that he ceases at the hatching because henceforth he is busy with the task of feeding the young; though this one, too, has weak spots, for the blackcaps and garden warblers do not stop their songs; besides, at night the young need no food and attention from the male bird. On the whole, I would rather offer no theory as to why the song ends *suddenly*—with rare exceptions such as I have given—when the young are out of the shells; but I strongly incline to think that the reason why the nightingale's singing season is so soon over is that the strain is too great to keep up. There is nothing

like that strain in any bird I have heard. Much of the blackcap's lovely music is desultory. Many of the airs he whistles can mean no strain at all. He flings them out casually, whilst he moves from twig to twig, and is more intent on his food than on music. Moreover, his merit as singer depends on other qualities than the nightingale's. There is absolutely nothing of the nightingale rattle and volley in him. His voice has none of the amazing carrying power of the nightingale's, which travels on a still night three-quarters of a mile over uneven ground, and may travel even a mile.

There are birds in plenty which sing far longer at a stretch than any nightingale. The skylark's songs last longer—and perhaps the skylark is the English bird that in strain and effort comes nearest the nightingale, save for the longer outbursts in the June night by the river of that fiery-hearted little thing, the sedge warbler. The garden warbler's songs last sometimes much longer. There is a polyglot, too, in almost every European country but ours, or two polyglots, melodious willow warbler, and Icterine warbler, the German's mocking-bird, that need not pause for breath so often as the nightingale. I roughly timed one of these, I think—I do not know them well enough to distinguish between them—and the song lasted without the least break for a hundred and fifty seconds! But here again the strain is slight compared with the nightingale's; against him the

melodious willow warbler or the Icterine warbler is quite a weak singer.

In the wild state the nightingale ends by or before mid-June in England. A few late nesters or perhaps unmated birds continue another week; and some years ago I knew of one that sang on well into July in the long spinney of underwood and timber by Micheldever Station, a spot in some years full of nightingales. But a nightingale singing in July is extremely rare. Mid-June is really the end of it—and the last song the bird gives has often his full strength and glory. I grant this does not argue that the strain is telling and that the effort in such a narrow engine cannot be sustained. But it may be because the feat is kept within strict time limits that it is possible at all in so small a creature, a bare six inches from head to tail! I have read that to get song out of a caged nightingale beyond the set allowance of it, the seven or eight weeks, in Nature, the bird has to be given special fare for a stimulus; and even then many nightingales keep mute.

There is another point about the song and nesting of Philomel that has been overlooked. What is the motive at this season of that habit I call the nightingale thrill? I touched on it imperfectly in "The Glamour of the Earth," but beyond this I know of nothing written about this striking habit. It is common, I imagine, to both sexes, though I have only seen it in the hen bird. "Soon a hen nightingale flew

into a hazel stem near where I lay, and her bearing told me she had just come from her nest. She took no notice of me, as I remained perfectly still. Her body vibrated intensely for a few seconds, as in an ecstasy; and several times she spread out a red-brown tail like a fan, deliberately opening and shutting it." This was repeated once or twice later after the cock bird had brought green caterpillars to the young.

The blackbird, the cock bird early in the spring, has a delicate action of somewhat the same nature, as he spreads his tail and raises and lowers it; though the action in the blackbird is sprightly rather than subtle like the nightingale's. Akin, too, is the tail play in the redstart. I hardly know a more fascinating thing to watch in small bird life. Abroad I saw Moussier's warbler or redstart—one of the most local birds in the world—and I noticed that he, too, had the tail shiver of our redstart, though Canon Tristram and Mr. Whitaker have described it, I think, as more like that of the chat than of the redstart family. These movements of the nightingales and redstarts and others of their frail-built kind, point, I think, to a sensitiveness most fine and curious.

These birds live an intense life at this season, as indeed at all seasons—things full of nervous power and feeling. Perhaps no bird is really phlegmatic, but contrasted with the nightingale, many seem so—such as a pipit or a bunting.

Many people come to England to hear nightingales

—they will cross an ocean to that end—and it *is* a great song, amazing in power and rapture! But I promise the enthusiast that by watching these birds at close quarters between mid-April and mid-June he may almost double the pleasure. There are not many things perhaps that can take us so securely from the world and its "low-thoughted cares" as watching nightingales in May and June in English coppices.

CHAPTER IX

LILLIPUT

TO get a good idea, very simply, of the life without limit in green English places at midsummer, it is enough to take a little stick and strike a few oak or hazel boughs at the edge of the wood. Instantly the air a yard or two about the bough touched is showered with tiny moths. They flick out into the open, and, finding no shelter there, drop to the field grasses or swiftly retreat to their cover. I do not think it much matters where the wood of Lilliput is, if only it holds a good sprinkling of oak-trees, with plenty of undergrowth. We may tap each low bough we pass, and at each stroke the air is lively for a few seconds with the same crowd of startled and alert creatures fleeing from the possible foe. The majority of the crowd is made up in many places of a green tortrix, the oak moth. "Tortrix viridana" is the scientific name of one of the prettiest members of the great group of minute moths called "Micro-lepidoptera." It has not the fine speckled and wavy system—dot, band, line, and *fasciæ*, which makes up the pencilled patterns so exquisite in detail that are features of many of its kind; but its front wings are painted

apple-green; and here we may end an error once for all about the colour of the oak moth—it does not confuse its wearer with the leaves around. One may easily test this by tapping a bough or two, picking out of the fleeing crowd a few oak moths and marking where they alight. What do they look like when at rest again? Whether they alight and set flat their wings on the upper or lower side of the leaf of oak —or hazel, elm, maple, cornel tree, or any other common bush of the mixed English underwood—they are in distinct contrast with that leaf. Our apple-green tortrix, indeed, is clipped or bitten out very cleanly on the oak-leaf; and if at a careless glance he does not seem to be an insect at rest, he may be taken for a small shed bit of leaf of another kind of tree, or even a small key or samara of maple or ash kind; that he is not part of his perch is clear in a moment.

The true armour of oak tortrix was never forged in the factory of colour. Rather it lies in a swift response to the smallest shock of the branch on which the moth sits. No sooner has the possible foe—in the form, say, of a small bird—lit on that branch than the tremor has flashed, as by electric current, to each leaf and slender twig and warned off all tiny moths resting there.

Not in the winged insect alone but in its grub we find the same prompt response to the least shock or stir in the branch. Tap the oak stem in May and

down comes a shower of small green caterpillars, each dangling by a long, fine, silken thread. Each was hid in an oak leaf rolled round to a tube, and before the bird's bill could be thrust into that tube—unless that bird's feet trod the branch with a more than willow warbler lightness—the caterpillar was swinging in mid-air seven or ten feet below.

The grub in this act is automaton, we may say: tortrix shoots down when the twig is touched, as a little lid flies up when the spring in good working order is pressed.

With this apple-green tortrix half a dozen other members of this strange world of mystic moths will often scatter from the oak or hazel bough. Some are many times minuter even than itself—moths among them that came from mites of grubs that tunnel within the thin leaf of the bramble and other plants. There is at least one member of a group of these minim miners—Nepticula—that with its wings full spread can barely cover the eighth of an inch.

So that in this lovely Lilliput of real life—Lilliput for the lucky lepidopterist!—even the Bedford blue, smallest of our English butterflies, might almost bulk as an inhabitant of Brobdingnag.

A few shakes of the bough on one of the longest days of the year and we can scarcely fail to drive out a variety of these hasty little things that with their palpi and antennæ set more problems than a school of philosophers can solve. There are some in which

these obscure palpi are far longer than the head from which they project like doubled beaks; in one kind quite straight perhaps, in another curved upward.

We name them palpi, and our knowledge ends at this—for our knowledge of a minim moth, tinea or tortrix, can hardly be said to have begun.

It is the antenna of Lilliput that always appeals to me chiefly. No doubt we must turn to the microscope if we wish to value fully the amazing variety of form and the extreme perfection of finish which are common to this realm of life. An antenna can be taper—an antenna can be toothed. It can be serrated, can be pectinated. An antenna can be clubbed, as all must see who have glanced at the horns of a butterfly. It can be haired or it can be plumed.

A little of all this, and more than this, can be gathered without the aid of a glass. But what I think we cannot fail to appreciate, though the moth is not larger than this green tortrix or adela longhorns or one of the odd little crambidæ which in myriads lie head down along the grass stems in every meadow at midsummer, is the sensitiveness of these often ornamented organs.

I know of no feature in a live thing, large or small, so eloquent of subtle sense and mystic action as these quivering, refinest threads of matter. Might not the brains of a butterfly be in the antennæ? It wants no great effort of imagination to seat the heart of a moth there too.

Surely it must be through the antennæ that the fiery-hearted emperor moth is led, swiftly and surely, on its love errand? Forel, a great German scientist, in his work on the senses of insects, told how the emperor moths could be brought to besiege his closed window, right in the town of Lausanne, through this blind, unerring pursuit sex; and every artful collector, I believe, knows well how easy it is to play upon the same passion in the emperor—"the desire of the moth for the star."

The long, grey, quivering antennæ of the oak tortrix, or the far longer antennæ of the green adela, that often flies by day in the bright sun, tell one the same tale. Whether they are largely or wholly love-finders or not, one is sure they are the seat of something supremely essential to this moth life.

What a powerful part the moth—one of the humblest and perhaps most despised things in creation to most of us—plays in the drama of Nature, may in some degree be realized if we look at the oak woods at midsummer. Earlier in the season, in passing the woods at the western edge of the New Forest, I have been struck by the vivid freshness of the young foliage. Scarcely a leaf seemed to have suffered the smallest hurt. But a week later a scourge fell on the mass of the oaks in ten thousand woods. The caterpillar of the green tortrix had hatched. In a few nights whole trees were struck by a blight that turned the foliage to a wretched, lifeless-looking brown. On some trees

a bough was spared here and there, its radiant green only emphasizing the sick appearance of the rest of the tree. If a killing black frost had struck the oak woods it could not have nipped and spoilt the leaves more completely than these tortrix grubs had done in these few nights. They rolled and shrivelled up some of the fresh green leaves so that no shape or design was left; others they shredded so that nothing remained but midribs and rags and tatter. All this ruin was done by grubs so trifling that a willow warbler or chiff-chaff will gather several *in* its bill—one of the smallest in bird build—before she flies with the food to her young; and were the insect eaters a hundred times as numerous as they are in England the oaks would still turn brown and sick in May and early June from the scourge of tortrix.

What must the numbers of this green oak moth be! This life is, to all human reckoning, infinite; and, so far as we can grapple with such numbers, the minim moth is boundless at the spheres.

What lasting harm the tortrix does to the tree I cannot say; I am not sure that of necessity it harms the tree at all, though it strips it for weeks of all beauty and brightness. It is usual, of course, it is our common form, to say that these scourges are wholly evil—but are they really? If we look at all closely at the oaks to-day we see at once the blight is over. The shreds and rags and tatter still hang to the twigs, and the brown still sicklies the whole face of the wood.

But on every branch a new spring is starting. The oaks are budding again, and the most forward of them —those that were struck earliest by the blight of the tortrix—are already beginning to put out new leaves.

Strength Through Struggle—this would make a motto for the whole green world. I am not sure I might not apply it to the oak-tree struck by this scourge. The struggle may well retard the oak somewhat in its growth to perfection, to the ultimate hardness and soundness of the heart-wood; but it may, too, ensure an upkeep of the strength.

Nothing lasting, nothing strong, nothing beautiful, is known in God's Creation that has not come and is not conserved through struggle. We dare not overlook this truth, in the management of men's affairs.

CHAPTER X

STORM SPRITES

I. THE GULLS

A CRITIC, writing about a book of mine named "The Airy Way," charged me with not understanding natural flight, for I had not seen the albatross. Separated, both charges would be too true. I have never seen an albatross on the wing; whilst as for natural flight nobody does understand it, nobody ever has: Borelli did not, nor did Michael Angelo, nor Pettigrew, nor Marey—that brilliant, confident French mind. Men of mathematics, men of mechanics are constantly working at the problem to-day, and are baffled by the soaring of an eagle or a vulture, or by the mystic feats of a sea-gull, just as their forebears were baffled. But though I would go far and give far more than I can afford to see the glorious albatross, the sight, alas! does not help one to guess the secret of the way of a bird through the air. Indeed, may it not make the secret it makes only harder?

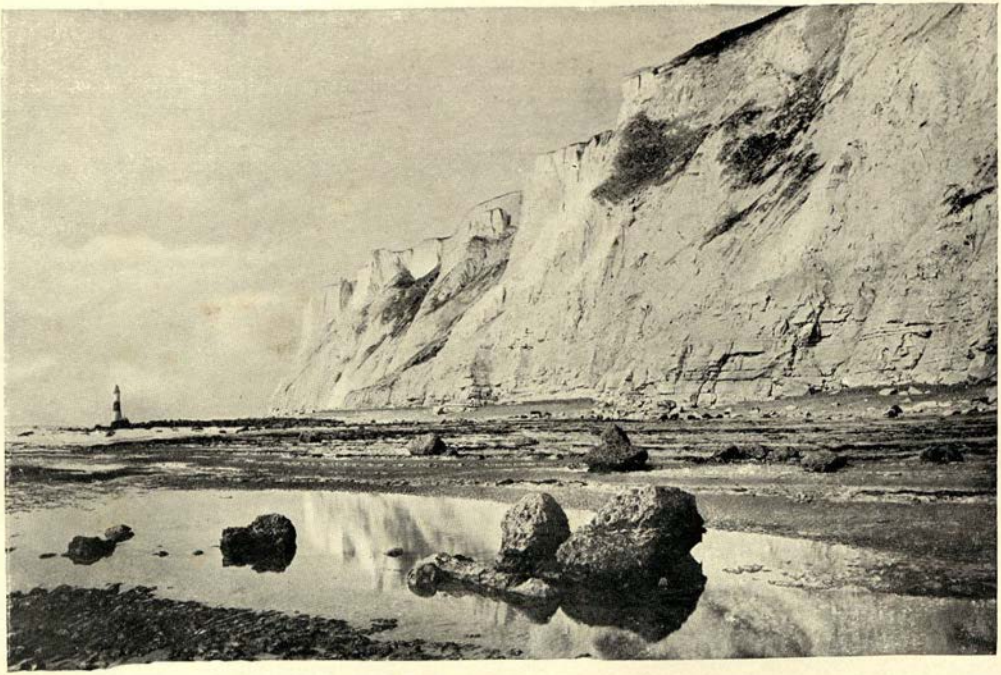
Long ago Bennett watched the wandering albatross in Southern seas. He worked out its flight against the wind with the sailing of a ship against the wind, and

found that the bird, tacking in its evolutions like a ship, could sail within two points of the wind; whereas, in like conditions, a cutter close-hauled could only sail within four and a half points—and another ship within six points. What this means is well shown by a diagram in Bree's "Birds of Europe"—for the albatross reaches European, sometimes even British, seas—and the wonder of the thing is very great.

I hope to see this bird of God if I live long enough. Meanwhile, I *have* seen the Arctic skua in European waters, and the common black-headed gull on the South Coast of England in a wild storm. Now, if we could understand the flight of the skua in calm and of the gull in storm, we might, I fancy, easily guess the albatross's secret without seeing the albatross. Their secret is one and the same.

The skua and the common swift, the golden eagle and the griffon vulture, the herring gull and the lesser black-backed gull, and this black-headed gull, by their wingship, only put the same riddle in varying phrases in the language of flight. Which phrase is the most expressive and beautiful I never can determine for long together. I thought the eagle's best when I watched the eagle in the Grampians, and the vulture's best when one day I watched the vultures in Sicily. On other days the Arctic skua and the English swift surpassed the eagle and the vulture.

On the Cornish cliffs in mid-June the lesser black-



"THIS ENGLAND HEMMED IN BY THE MAIN."

backed gulls was to me the act of all these acts when he rose from his stack-rocks, and swung round and round me in his miles of mazy motion!

But in a wild storm that beat one day on the coast between Poole and Christchurch, the black-headed gull, just the ordinary bird we can see any winter day in London, was the master of them all in this wizardry of wing.

I wondered when I went out on the front to watch the storm if any bird could brave it. Right up the high crumbling cliffs, what looked like an endless shower of scraps of torn white paper was scudding, darting fleetly through the air, and being swept away inland. This was the spume of the ravening storm. It appeared snow-white as it whirled through the air, but when I reached the strand, I found it was yellowish or amber-coloured froth.

Instead of flying, it was flowing inland like a shallow and swift stream; and where any obstacle dammed its course, the froth gathered into masses absolutely like snow in a lane or against a hedge. The drifts lay two and three feet deep in places, and men were sweeping them from the doorsteps just as snow is swept. But for the yellow tinge the illusion of snow, snow of the sea, would have been complete. It was only when one looked closely at these drifts that a jelly-like tremulousness was seen, and the extreme tenuity of the whole quivering mass became apparent.

The fury of a storm can be measured by its spume, and I should never have believed, had I not seen them at this very spot, that the black-headed gulls could ride with ease on a wind that tortured the sea like this. But the gulls not only rode on this storm, they poised on it, rested in it, faced it full, and constantly drove clean into and through it. Watching Arctic skuas once in the Mediterranean during calm or a moderate breeze, I could only rarely see a few strokes, or half-strokes of their narrow, rigid wings. I saw them glide many hundreds of yards just above the water without the slightest sign of a stroke, or a half or quarter stroke; and they changed their course constantly, and swerved round and flew back, and then swerved again and returned and caught up the ship—still on those rigid wings which all but touched, yet never touched, the surface of the sea. So that watching them was an enchantment, and I was put out of love with all other birds. The wonder of the thing was to me the nearness of the bird to the water—swimming with never a fault, and always tireless, in only a few inches of air.

A swift has heights at least to bear him, heights in which he rushes and screams and revels as only a swift can in those wild summer evening parties. An eagle has a whole empire of air, a heaven of it, in which to wind and coil himself, out of ken above the forests and hills. Either of these acts of flight is a *tour d'aile*. Yet, watching the black-headed gull in

the storm, one is out of love with swifts and eagles even.

Almost the first thing I notice about the gull in the storm is the perfect tidiness, smoothness of its plumage. It is all the same whether the gull move against the storm, across the storm, or with it—not a feather is ruffled or awry. I have read that birds do not like flying with the wind, as it ruffles their feathers; the man who thought this forgot the gull. The gull is groomed to perfection. The cut and fit of his clothes—for feathers were made for clothes as well as for oars—are a constant wonder to me.

A human tailor is a bungler compared with the tailor Evolution. There is no doubt about the prime importance of exact cut and fit in this establishment. On the Fifth Day the scissors of Creation must have cut exceeding fine and true. Otherwise the black-headed gull would fail in the storm.

Next I notice the perfect serenity of the gull in a gale, across or against or with which men are staggering on land and small ships are in peril at sea. After flying, say, a hundred yards with or across it, he swings round and on rigid, full-spread wings slides straight out into it; and he can slide so for a hundred yards or more. He appears, as I have noted before, in high winds at the edge of the cliffs to be *drawn out* into the gale by some strong, invisible wires.

I watch this act over and over again, and cannot

see enough of it for delight and the wonder that never grows less. How *is* it done? Every theory about natural flight I have hugged myself fails to assure me when I watch the gull acting thus in not a high wind but a raging storm. Figure-of-eight action, inclined planes, the screw, the wedge, momentum, and the rest of our stock-in-trade about a bird's way through the air—all seem so absurd in the actual presence of the miracle. We may go to Bertram or to Maskelyne and Cook and convince ourselves we know how their sleight of hand is done. There are always those who know how the trick with the watch or ring and napkin is done!

It is another matter when we get to gulls. Sleight of hand is the way of men, sleight of wing the way of Gods.

There is, I admit, a difference, a shade of a difference, between the flight of the black-headed gull in the storm and in the calm or moderate breeze. When the gull is sliding into the gale and across it, the strokes or half-strokes of the wings are made more often than they are in the calm. Besides, there is a trifle of difficulty, always soon overcome, still a difficulty in balancing. A black-headed gull never loses his balance in the storm. That to me is unthinkable. On his unseen tightropes of the sky he is ten thousand times securer than Blondin in Blondin's easiest feat. But now and then, when he brings up in the storm that he may drop to the

surface of the white surf and pick a morsel of food off it, or when he is swerving round to enter on a new course, there is an agitation of wing-tips which tells how even a gull must look to his balance.

In a second or less he is sliding again into the gale or across it, serene and featly as ever.

Of the petrel I will write immediately: the albatross I only know from hearsay. The petrel and the albatross may well stand for storm—life and all lithe-ness in it. But I do not believe the albatross himself, even with that immense and noble wing, can ride much easier on the gale than this black-headed gull. The gull at least, like the petrel and the albatross, is a true sprite of the storm.

II. THE PETRELS

Beyond the Scillys in true Atlantic I made the close acquaintance of the stormy petrels, Mother Carey's chicken, and I think these swallows of the ocean are quite as good to watch as the swallows of the earth. Of course, there is no affinity between petrel and swallow in the scientific classing of birds. They are far less related in the line of evolution, I suppose, than the swallow and the swift. But I differ altogether from the authority which tells me that the storm petrel looks rather like a swallow only to the eyes which view it casually or carelessly. The

likeness between them is irresistible. It is the petrel, not the tern, that should be styled "sea-swallow." One thinks of the swallow or the house-martin on first seeing the storm petrel, and the idea of swallows of the sea remains strong as long as one watches the tireless, wonderful flock in the wake of the ship.

A man-of-war, to one, at least, who has never before made a voyage in a man-of-war, is not a good spot for watching the life and movement of a bird. It is too full of the stir and sound of human life, and of the stern, splendid rite of war in peace-time, for us to attend to such matters as those of the flight and habit of a bird. I know, through one or two friends who write to me, that things of Nature are by no means always overlooked by seamen; but, then, what is stately ceremony to a landsman new to a ship of war must be commonplace to the sailor; what to me is romance, beautiful, and very moving about the work and array of casting and securing the huge anchors, or about the open muster or the clockwork drill and duty, is to a seaman simple routine. So that I can understand a seaman having more thought and sight for things of Nature, whilst on a voyage or at anchor, than the landsman. Yet I found a spot on the quarter-deck where it was possible to watch without distraction for an hour or so at a stretch the petrels that followed us for the best part of two days in the Atlantic. Sometimes I would lose sight of them almost entirely for a minute or thereabouts. One

petrel had discovered some fragments of refuse flung out of the ship, and swiftly alit to paddle with its web foot at the surface of the sea; whereupon it would be instantly joined by the whole eager flock.

But a ship must be moving at very high speed to leave these sea sprites for long behind, though they may stop and dally many minutes over refuse or some natural food churned up by the screws. Soon the whole flock come into sight again, and, for every knot which the vessel makes, the petrel, I think, must make two or three. His course is quite like that of the swallow hawking for flies over the land or the sea-cliff or lake. With, across, or dead against the wind the petrel is ever turning, tacking. His tangents how endless!

A petrel was not made to fly in a straight course for many yards together. It was never meant that he should do in one mile of wing-ship what can be done as easily in many. He might, perhaps, find quite as much food by following more or less in a straight course the path of the ship as a gull will sometimes follow when the ship is not travelling too slowly. But such a course entails an economy of exertion, and that is the last thing called for in a petrel.

So far as flight is exertion, a petrel's store appears to be almost boundless. An extra ten miles an hour, an extra hundred miles of motion a day, is of no moment to a petrel. It has seemed to me, whilst watching the bold, clean rushes and the swishing

curves and long-drawn-out glides of the swifts, that these unearthly creatures must actually rest in action and in speed. A petrel scarcely gives the idea of tremendous speed on the wing, "skiey speed," as a swift gives it. Still, he is very quick—can leave the ship for five minutes to overtake it when he chooses, eliminating a mile of space—perhaps two miles, allowing for a petrel's glancing, fluctuating course—as if it really did not count.

* * * * *

Where I met with the petrel party—I reckoned that about a hundred of them followed the ship—it was real ocean. I did not see them till we were far from any land, and I lost sight of the last of them before we dimly sighted land again next day. The stormy petrel's element is air and ocean, and far the greater part of his life is spent out of touch with the least vestige of land. In that sense he is more unearthly than the swift, though he has none of the swift's demonic aspect on the wing, being quite a familiar-looking little bird on the whole, formed on extraordinary bird lines of perfect loveliness and grace—these things being ordinary in that fay-like world of feather.

For months together in his wondrous year, probably for a full ten out of the twelve, no perch or cliff or rock is possible for him. I suppose that the petrel, like the gull or the skua, does either at night or day float from time to time in water instead of in air, but

I am clear that he can fly for hours at a stretch without the least fatigue, and that he can fly thus even though a gale blows fresh enough to rock the heaviest ship of war.

The swift has a perching nook at least at night; the swallows of the earth and the sand martins, after flitting for hours up and down the river where it broadens nobly as it nears its solemn, shining estuary, will retire now and then for a few minutes' rest to the wooden rails or the telegraph wires, and sit there in their lively, sociable parties. But surely the petrel does outstrip them all in ceaseless energy, though he is outstripped by swifts in speed. The storm petrel is quite a small bird. He is scarcely more than six inches from beak to tail all told: that is, he is an inch less than a skylark. Nor is the wing that works these wonders a long one—it is but a fraction, indeed, longer than the skylark wing; it is a fraction shorter than the earth swallow's.

I do not think there is anything obvious in the special cut of the petrel's wing and tail—I am sure there is nothing in his measure—that gives us the clue to his secret of incessant motion, alike in calm and in wild and stormy winds that rock great ships and heave up the ocean. There are only two ways to explain the secret of the petrel's endurance hour after hour, day after day, in lashing storms far out in the ocean. Either the petrel is endued with an extraordinary strength of pinion and driving muscle

compressed into a very small space, or we are quite deceived by appearance, and what looks like active exertion in the bird is really next to no exertion.

I incline to think that it is in the latter we had better look for the petrel's gift of untiring motion in stormy air. No doubt his mechanism of flight is extremely fine, exactly calculated and adjusted. He has not a weak point in his six inches. Petrel signifies perfection. But even so I cannot think that his powers are great to strive with hard winds and to sustain him for years in the struggle. The better explanation is that in reality the petrel need not and does not exert himself to keep afloat so long in ocean storms.

I believe a petrel does not fight with the wind. He fits into the wind.

What I have often said of the black-headed or of the herring gulls is equally true of the petrels—if the bird in some degree flies the wind, the wind in great degree flies the bird.

What seems the difficulty of a petrel is, in fact, his ease. So we may rid ourselves of the error that assumes a miracle of endurance in the bird. I should say that the skylark's few inches is as strongly knit and about as enduring as the petrel's, only almost infinitely less enduring in a storm because Nature does not fly the lark in the storm. The lark does not fit into the high winds, but, if it finds itself therein, strives to fight them, and, of course, must fail.

The stormy petrel, unlike so many of our birds,

was well christened. By its web foot it can dabble or patter at the surface of the sea in storm. Hence petrel, or the little Peter, an image taken from the miracle at the Sea of Galilee. But the sailor long since gave it another and less kindly name, Mother Carey's Chicken. In the folk-lore of the sea the petrel still has an evil repute, though I suspect the idea of its announcing the storm is dying out.

A petrel must fly and seek its food in the calms of the sea as well as in the storms, though the storm no doubt stirs to the surface more of the tiny molluscs and crustaceans on which the bird lives. Perhaps a petrel is more active in a troubled than in a still sea —I doubt if there is more more truth than this in the notion that his appearance in the wake of the ship foretells a storm.

CHAPTER XI

FASCINATION OF FUR

AS the wild cat is an absolutely disappearing animal in Scotland I dare to express a hope that henceforth we shall get our wild cats outside the British Isles when we need them for Zoological Gardens or for Museums. This is putting mildly what some of us feel rather strongly. I confess I am one of those who read with distaste of Inverness sending one of its last true wild cats to Regents Park. I had rather Inverness had got a thousand cats from London than London one from Inverness. There is no special value in showing to people in London or in any city, either in its live form or its dead form, a real British example of a very rare animal; and this applies equally to beast and bird and butterfly. If we need honey buzzards or wild cats or Glanville fritillary butterflies to show to people in towns who would not otherwise see them, why cannot we fetch them from some country where the wild stock is still large and the species safe?

The wild cat and such rare birds as honey buzzard and sea eagle—that is, true British specimens of them—should be put on a forbidden list so far as all public bodies go. Museums and Zoological Gardens should

pass a self-denying ordinance. They should do so for an example to private people, and in the interest of science too—and this ought to be a strong inducement with such bodies; for science always must greatly desire that the wild creatures which it studies be not ended.

It is the same too with the polecat and the pine marten. I fear that when these creatures are found in England to-day they are nearly always "obtained." The pine marten, some say who have studied the matter, was never, within historical times, at home in the South of England and has only been a chance visitor there. I dare say that is so, yet the marten is certainly mentioned by at least one old writer as an animal of the Southern Counties. I cannot recall whether one reference to it which I found some years ago was in Michael Drayton's "Polyolbion" or in some forest perambulations. But I remember a note on the "marten cat" as a wild animal of Chute Forest, and I should hardly think that by marten cat any animal but the pine marten was meant.

The polecat, little doubt, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a wild animal of Chute and the great wild woodlands that lay about that district in Wiltshire and the neighbouring shire. Indeed, it must have been, I think, a native of many of our remoter hills and woods till late in the last century. I have spoken with country folk who take some interest in these matters, and they have "heard tell"

of the polecat running wild, the source of their information being grandfather or even father—though, perhaps, father heard tell from grandfather, and grandfather from *his* father. These heard-tells sometimes go very deep into a past century, for very likely father was eighty and grandfather was eighty, too, and *his* father about the same age. Whether native or not such a creature as the pine marten would clearly have stood no chance of living on in these Southern Counties through the nineteenth century. The stoat or ermine and the weasel belong to quite another class in this matter. Few people want to own a stoat's fur (unless it chances to be ermine white in winter), and nobody in the world, I suppose, wants a weasel's coat. It is the valued vermin that goes always in danger of extermination. Stoat and weasel are in many districts not in the remotest danger of being trapped out. A war of extermination against weasels would be as likely to succeed to-day in England as a war of extermination against the pike and jack of our trout streams.

I am sure that in some places the stoat is quite a useful creature. It is of service, for instance, to the owner of a trout fishery where the banks are much honeycombed by rats and water voles. The stoat preys on both these animals, and a large percentage of all the stoats in the country are, I believe, attached always to rivers. Now and then they may wander a short way from the banks where they were born and

bred, and may seize a rabbit or a young game bird, but their ordinary prey is rat or water vole. The stoat that preys on these animals is almost an amphibian. He can swim and he can dive with perfect safety and ease. I have heard of a stoat turning himself into a miniature otter and taking to a fish diet, but I have no experience whatever in this, and I should think that stoat was a freak. But at the water's edge, and at times even over the brink, a stoat is in his element.

Sitting down by the stream one summer day, and waiting for a good trout to rise, I heard a singular little chattering noise coming from the grass and river plants right opposite. I did not recognize the *note* at first as a stoat's; it was entirely unlike the sound I have heard stoats utter when they have been chased or are otherwise excited. It was more like a bird sound. The jarring continued, and several times I heard a slight plash in the water as if a trout were "tailing" there among the weeds. Presently I caught sight of a bit of white and brown fur, and then the avid face of a stoat. A pair of these creatures were frisking in and out among the vole or rat holes in the bank opposite, and if ever a thing in wild life looked like a game of hide-and-seek this was it.

Again and again one of the stoats darted out of a hole half under water, and after a quick spy round darted up into another hole a foot away. The plash must have been repeated half a dozen times, and the chattering or jarring note of pursuer and

pursued went on for ten minutes or more. It may have been a love lyric and a love chase, or simply a bit of frolic for the sake of frolic; and watching the play I inclined to think it was pure stoat abandon, irrepressible fun in a creature full of joy and spirit.

That is not the only time I have watched a stoat game of hide-and-seek by a trout stream. Some years ago I saw a pair of stoats—not, however, uttering the same jarring note—whip about after each other by the Lambourne stream in Berkshire. Their game was on the dry land and wholly above ground. They chivvied one another in and out among the grass and sedges in a meadow, and all the while they cried out gleefully. I have watched a stoat, too, carrying her young by the skin of the back across a river plank, and doing it bravely even after she saw I had discovered her. That was an idyll of stoats!

Again, I have seen these animals hot on the scent of a doomed water vole. The keenness of a stoat or weasel is one of the most expressive things I know in the life of wild creatures. A stoat or a weasel—it matters not which—is keener than the word "keen."

Litheness, suppleness in the extreme, is another feature of these little beasts, a true ferret feature. A friend told me of a fierce fight on the Buckinghamshire downs he had seen between two stoats—a fight, he believed, to the death, for in the end, when interrupted, one of them half-limped, half dragged itself off to cover in a way that seemed to show its wounds

were *mortal.* They wreathed and wrapt about each other, as if neither had a bone in its whole body. They spun round and round each other, teetotum-like, so that the eye could not separate them.

There is a stoat superstition among some workers in woods and fields which is not hard to understand. A worker told me gravely of a man who came upon a party of stoats on a road one day—and it was the man who was attacked. That was an iliad of stoats. I think this countryman Achilles was indeed attacked about his weak point, the heel, but he lived to tell the tale.

There is a thing I have never seen the stoat or weasel do which I can no longer doubt is one of the common habits of its life; I never saw it juggle with its tail and body, or with a scrap of rabbit fur, to a spellbound circle of little birds. At the end of that wise foolery a little bird sometimes gets into the mouth of the acrobat. It is his fee. There is not the faintest doubt about it; the thing has been seen too often by many eyes for doubt. It is quite another story than that of the little vipers that go down the throat of the mother viper—which, I think, is one of Nature's little juggles at the expense of man.

The stoat or the weasel—for they are one, however many million years have parted them—has an ill name and deserves it. Yet he deserves the contrary, too. We cannot deny he has been fashioned with a skill minutely wonderful. So fell—so fine! He is,

like the cat, one perfect piece. But he is more than the cat; in his sinuousness the stoat has something of the serpent. Cat and serpent and stoat—the union seems past perfection physically. The stoat is, humanly, one of those contrarieties that face us almost anywhere in the world of wild life; on one side all beauty—on the other, all bane.

CHAPTER XII

FASCINATION OF FEATHER

EVERYBODY is familiar with the idea of the fascination of the snake. It is one of the most primitive things in all Nature lore, playing its part in the very story of creation. "Like birds the charming serpent draws" is a simile taken as good and true, I imagine, by all people. But if the serpent can fascinate, why not other wild creatures? It was suggested to me by a great collector of birds that a spell or fascination works in the glitter of the green and red eyes of diving birds, by which small fishes are drawn to their doom; he plays quite gravely with this idea, and, though it does not appeal much to me, I admit we do want some explanation for these high-coloured and flashing lights in the jewel-like eyes of divers.

I wish to suggest, however, quite another bird of prey which, I believe, often fascinates its victims. For years I have noticed the tawny owl attended closely, whenever it stirs by day or at the beginning of twilight, by many small birds. Of course, it may be objected at once that my idea of fascination or charm about the owl would apply more or less to

quite a number of birds, even in England alone, besides the owl. I may be told that I have myself described the mobbing of the golden eagle in the Grampians, of the sparrow-hawk by bodies of excited small birds, of the cuckoo—perhaps for his likeness to a hawk, perhaps through his own bad repute—and of the carrion crow, and even at times the rook. It is true that to be a bird of prey—that is, to prey on other birds or their eggs—is to be closely waited on by an excited throng, and even struck at and mobbed. It seems as if this rule were invariable—if we leave the shrike out of the list of birds of prey—and, by the way, it says much for the kestrel or windhover in his real home in the South that he is so free from the notice of small birds. I saw hundreds of kestrels in Algeria, in the spring of 1912, and I did not once see a kestrel mobbed or attended by small birds. The kestrel there, at least, seems to be innocent.

But the attendance on the tawny owl when he moves in the afternoon or early evening strikes me as quite a different thing from the mobbing of the hawks or the eagles or the crows. It is so extraordinarily keen and sustained. I have watched the business often where the tawny owl is concerned, and twice where the chief actor has been the long-eared owl, and the play has been in every case identical. So long as the tawny or the long-eared owl keeps perfectly still on his perch, the crowd of

small birds are quiet, and if he remains still long enough they gradually drop away and leave him to himself. But the least sign of activity by the owl brings the crowd around him again with renewed din and flutter. The mobbing of the tawny owl is far more marked than the mobbing of the cuckoo or the sparrow-hawk, save perhaps when the cuckoo gets involved with quite a pack of pipits on the open heath, or when the hawk has to fly through a network of swallows high in the air.

The tawny owl may rest during the day in a very thick plantation of firs or a shrubbery well screened from the sun. In the afternoon he stirs perhaps a few yards, noiselessly flying from one dark fir head to another only a few yards off. It is winter, let us say, and one might suppose that there were not half a dozen small birds within an ambit of a hundred yards or so. Yet he has scarcely stirred, no matter how silently, gliding ghost-like a few yards through the thick evergreens, before the finches, the titmice, and the blackbirds, with cock-robin and jenny wren, are up and after him.

There is a spot where I might make almost a nice itinerary of the owl, and time it quite correctly, without seeing the owl at all: I should work it out by seeing and hearing the bird crowd he gathers and carries along with him. He draws them to him as irresistibly as the magnet draws steel. I must not forget the missel-thrush. He is sure to be drawn in,

and he is the noisiest of all, noisier even than the jay that sometimes joins in the general hubbub.

Going up close to watch the scene, I find the tawny owl the centre of attraction, the small birds and the thrushes and the absurd jay all around, some of them undoubtedly within striking distance.

Now note the curious aspect of the owl, as we find it seated solemn, imperturbable, amidst all this clatter and flutter of creatures which beyond question form at times its prey—for nobody can deny that those owls feed on small birds as well as on mice and insects. Note the large, beautiful eyes, and the hooked bill set in the facial disk, which is surely the most peculiar feature of any English bird. Then the delicate pencillings and curious vermiculate markings of the exceedingly soft and thick plumage.

A hawk seems to be the expression of hardness and severity only: the owl seems at once all that is soft and all that is severe—the soft and severe, and, to the human fancy too, the sage bird bird of Athene.

Is it imagining quite wildly to suppose that this extraordinary, eccentric figure which the owl cuts in the daytime in itself exercises a strong fascination over the nervous and highly sensitive nature of many of these small birds? If the hooded serpent fascinates by its bizarre and sinister aspect may not the owl exercise in some degree a similar power through his glittering and blinking eye, and—with some species—his horn-like ears, horns of Satan for his victims? May he not

fascinate, too, by the wonderful facial disc, and the immense mass of quaintly patterned and fluffy feathers; as well as by the extreme, almost uncanny, silence of his flight, and the uncouth attitudes of stillness which he adopts on his perch?

In this *tout ensemble* of the tawny owl or of the long-eared owl it seems to me that we may, without forcing the imagination too much, presume a kind of sinister fascination for small birds. It may not be that fascination of fear which the serpent wields over its victim, or the stoat over the hunted rabbit. It is not, clearly, the fascination by frolic which the stoat or weasel, writhing, twisting, capering, exercises over the gallery of excited small birds. It may be something, rather, in the nature of fascination through oddity or bizarre appearance. Yet the charm may work not less effectually.

Now, I may be asked, have I ever seen the owl strike when thus encircled by a crowd of agitated spectators? I never have. But it is very hard, in cases like these, for the human watcher to see the play played right out. For one thing, he usually intrudes only to break the spell. It is so with the stoat and the rabbit, and no doubt with the serpent and its prey. Again, how few—if any—who have seen the stoat or weasel capering to a gallery, have seen the fell spring that ends the play! There is no fascination about a man intruding—there is only fright. But we do know for sure that the owl strikes small birds, and it is likely

that he withholds when hungry and his prey is fluttering and agitated all around him ?

Talking with a friend who is most interested in birds, I got from him two bits of evidence that certainly do not tell against this theory of fascination in an owl. We were discussing Italy and bird-life there, when he asked me had I seen the owl used by some of the people about Viterbo for sport ? There, and no doubt in other places in Italy, the custom is for two men to walk along the hedges and woodsides, one with a gun, the other carrying a pole on which a captive owl—this same tawny owl, I think—sits. The owl is made now and then to rise off its perch and flutter in the air, whereupon down to it come the small birds with a din, crowding into the bushes and trees so thick and so near the owl that the gunner can often shoot at his ease. When my friend saw this lure being used against the small birds it was autumn or early winter. In spring, when the small birds have nestlings, or young lately fledged and flown, the lure, I should say, would be still deadlier. If this does not point to fascination in an owl over its prey, I scarcely know whether we can believe in anything of the kind in Nature; and we must surely give up the notion that the stoat or weasel draws down the small birds by the charm of capering.

The captives of Viterbo are not the only birds that argue for a fascination in the owl. In Trinidad, my friend told me, there is a little owl which used to be

named Athene phalænoides, but is now known as Glaucidium phalænoides, that seems to put to constant service its power to draw small birds. A native, who was with my friend when going through a Trinidad forest, pointed out this owl, and said: "He catches little birds." Athene flies much by daylight, like our own short-eared or woodcock owl, and is regularly attended by the small birds on which it preys. I suspect there are owls, large and small, throughout the world which draw small birds as Athene and our tawny owl, wild or captive, draw them.

Therefore, I suggest that the tawny and many another owl may often win its prey through charming it within striking length. But I go no further. It would be going a great deal further to argue that the owl has been equipped to this end, or that the facial disk was evolved to fascinate. Still less would one care to suggest the owl knows its power and sagely uses it —that would be adding too much to the myth of Athene.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FLOCK OF FAYS

ON my bookshelf is a little childish black note-book, bought at Dublin, in which I was used to make all manner of odd scribblings, thumb-nail bits, about beasts and birds and butterflies. Some of the entries are not to be quite trusted: the facts in them were not well enough founded, or the theories of them have gone the way of most theories about Nature and about men—they have been exploded into thin air. Yet the notebook has points. Its leaves are exactly numbered, and before the middle of the book is reached comes the index, which, so far as it goes, is a good deal more exact and thorough than anything of the sort I have been able to work out since I took to professional bookmaking. But I flatter myself, or what was myself in those days—the most strenuous days, the old end of one's life—that the entries about at least one of the birds therein are minutely faithful. The book has some notes, easily found through the index in the middle, about the long-tailed titmouse, the bottle titmouse, as it was styled in my particular garden-boy, cow-boy, keeper's-son bird-nesting set; and memory and experience

tell me that each one of these entries is quite to be trusted.

The notes relate, of course, especially to the nesting of the long-tailed titmouse—for it was always the egg that began the bird then. One note tells how a pair of the birds had tried to build in the thatched—the reed-thatched—roof of an outhouse; another note how a pair actually succeeded in building a nest in the inside of a squirrel's "drey" in the high wood, and how the hen laid quite a number of eggs therein. I recall the nest, the exact site, and I recall climbing up to it and finding the eggs. It is all perfectly and absurdly distinct to-day. The truth is I specialized in the long-tailed titmouse in those bird-nesting days, and I have more or less specialized in the bird ever since.

It is worth specializing in, for it is one of the drollest little things, and at the same time it is one of the most exquisite little things in Nature in England—in Nature probably anywhere. There is a fascination about long-tailed titmice—there is such a faery fascination about them.

I see long-tailed titmice at all times of the year in England—oddly enough I have never seen or heard one of them abroad as I have cole, great, and blue titmice—and I have seen them again just lately, and fairly revelled in the sight. Long-tailed titmice really appear to me to grow droller and droller the longer I know them; and also they appear to get bonnier and bonnier. I advise anyone who wishes to please

an eye and thought for loveliness in feather form to go out any fine day in winter when the mixed tit-mouse flock is a common sight—and it is common enough in most wooded parts of England that I know at all—and see the loose string of these long-tails.

The best scene, perhaps, in the year of a long-tailed titmouse is that in April, and in the second half of March, the scene of the nest and at the nest. I have watched them as they move to and fro between the nest and the spot where, with a great deal of liveliest chitter-chatter, they gather the material: moss and webs for the wall, silver lichen to embellish or to help bind—or both perhaps—the outside, feathers for the eider-down bedding within. Then in gusty weather I have seen them tossed about in the air above the nest, if it is in a spot at all exposed, like scraps of paper or dead leaves caught up in a whirly-puff.

There is the late summer or autumn scene in the life of long-tailed titmice which I have only been lucky enough to see once—the scene where a whole large family of them, perhaps even two families come together for the purpose, form themselves into a close feathery bundle, and go to sleep on a branch, very much like one fair-sized bird—a jay or magpie—which has tucked its head into its breast and puffed out its feathers for the night. I took the long-tail titmouse bundle asleep in a bare tree for a magpie one evening, and only discovered my mistake on tapping

a branch, when instantly the thing split up into ten or twenty parts, and scattered in all directions with commotion.

Again, I know the scene of the sitting long-tailed titmouse when sometimes she is so trustful, or so devoted to her treasures, that she will suffer one to touch her head and yet not slip off the eggs and away. I have seen the bird sitting thus and lightly touched her, and she has not stirred, but I suspect the experience is rather rare. I have in April watched her weaving or webbing her nest, and watched within such a few paces that eventually she discovered me, and yet, after a period of hesitation and suspense, came back to the nest not more than half built up, ventured within, and forgot me and worked on as if she were alone ; her mate, so long as I stayed, coming near and fidgeting and scolding, but not actually braving it out like her. These things are truly of the rarest charm and beauty. Watching them in English woods and commons, when the year is getting on to what Shakespeare felt to be "the sweet," is, when we are in the right mood, is a pleasure that never loses its keenness."

But there is no need to wait for the sweet, or the bitter sweet, of March and April to enjoy long-tailed titmouse scenes. December indeed is as good a time as any to see the winter flocks of them. The best place is a wood, and they appear to pass and repass a favourite spot, a favourite group of birch-trees or oak-

trees in that wood two or three times a day, always finding plenty of food in the bark chinks and on the twig tips which is perfectly imperceptible to any human eye. I can go up the woodland ride any day sure to find one of the mixed titmouse flocks—it is hardly possibly to miss the thing. The best sight of the flock is when the long-tails keep more or less distinct from the rest, from blue and cole and great and marsh titmice and from nuthatches, tree-creepers and goldcrests—for these eight kinds of birds make up the full winter flock that flies and feeds and roosts together for six months each year.

Then as the long-tails pass from tree to tree, they cross the ride in a line of long, straight strings. The effect of it is singular and delightful. The long-tail's string is not quite like that of any procession I know. There are other creatures certainly that move in a line, and which move in a much more orderly manner than the long-tail. The caterpillars of the "procession moth," which I found in the Aleppo pines in the South spun up in their curious tow-coloured nest, move, Indian file, in straight lines. Various large birds seem to move through the sky as on taut lines. The long-tails cross the ride, whip from tree to tree, in no order, but the impression they give and leave on one is always that of the straight line, the string after string of them; so that the undulation of the flight, the end of one dropping bound, and the upspring and arc of the next, are somewhat masked.

It is the length of the tail, I suspect, and the fact that the tail is the most striking feature of the bird, which give this effect of strings of titmice.

Crossing the ride, and alighting in some birch underwood stems, they pay no heed to me: one or two pass so near they might almost have brushed me with their tiny wings—wings one could almost measure conveniently, as their eggs have often been measured by, not the inch, but the line. The nearest is so near I can distinctly see the red glitter of its eye. The books say that the long-tail's eye is hazel, but ruby seems to me nearer the colour. The books say that the colour about the back and underparts is a dull rose, it is a faint rose certainly, but the last thing I should call this delicate flush spread among the black and white of the long-tail would be dull.

The delicate redstart is a fay, the grey wagtail in his slate and gold is a fay; and the finery of the long-tail, I grant, is not so striking as theirs. The long-tail has no more their bold colour contrasts than he has their dance and balance or their butterfly frolic in the air for food. A grey wagtail is a *tour de force* of the small bird creation—and a redstart runs him very fine! The long-tail is perhaps not that, rather he is an oddity, a peculiar among the fays which are flocking now through the commons and woods.

He is a spry, whimsical, muffled-up little bundle of down, his featherlets in a constant state of ruffle,

as himself in temperament seems in a constant state of fluster.

When with mousy movements the long-tail creeps in and out among the twigs of the birch-tree, slithers from tip to tip, seeking and always finding the minutest atom of a grub or particle of mould, he does not strike one as a fay of spirit. He seems to express meekness and weakness like a willow warbler. But he has mettle. The great heart is housed within this tiny and weak thing, as I have found it in the goldcrest, in the copper and Bedford-blue butterflies.

It is the passion of a few moments, perhaps, with the long-tails, but in those moments it is fierce and valiant. When the fatal sparrowhawk, often waiting on these flocks, swoops down to strike home they rise in a body and make a demonstration before which even the marauder may sometimes retire. In those moments the long-tail is transformed. The gentle fay is become a fury.

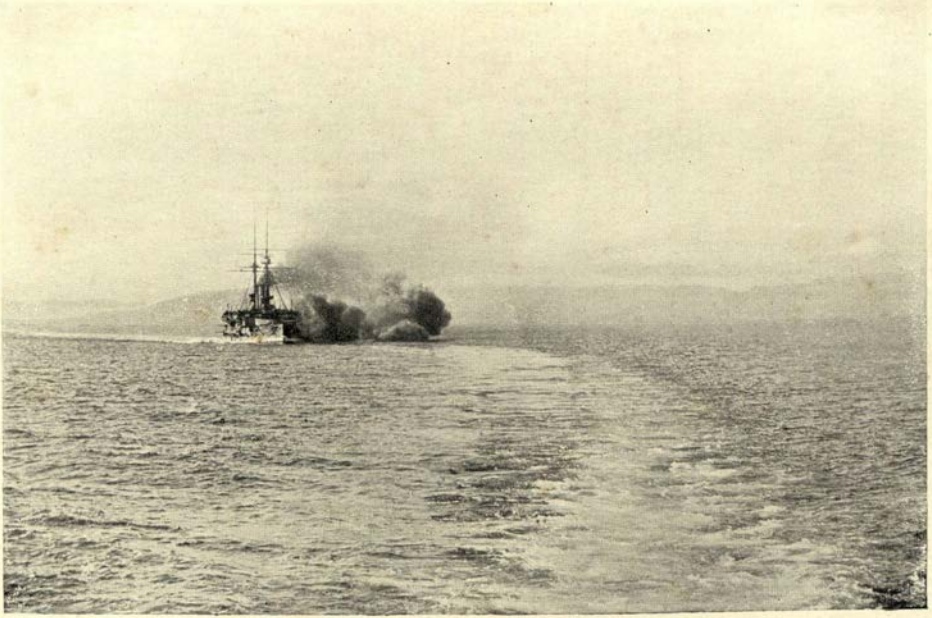
CHAPTER XIV

HENGISTBURY

HENGISTBURY HEAD, as I have known it and cared for it, is at an end. I suppose the Finance Act has ended it, for where severely human questions as to building value, undeveloped land duty, and the increment come in Nature goes. Nature cannot abide "the rate." Two of her creatures do sometimes linger on among the plots of yellow brick and half-made roads and hoardings that advertise "eligible" estates suited for "residential" neighbourhoods—the wall butterfly of late summer and the common bunting of the whole English year; and the wall butterfly at least, whether seen in the shimmer of Sicilian sea cliffs or in the squalor of the environs of a growing English town, is a thing all joy and loveliness. But even they are soon gone. The wall butterfly must have at least a dusty footpath through grass and a few flowers to settle on, and strike the attitude that seems to be common to all butterflies—the attitude of sun ecstasy; the bunting must have a clod of earth in an open field or a patch of wild scrub from which to sing that extraordinary song of his, a song that is made up of wheeze and stutter.

Hengistbury Head and the bit of wild and wet ground between the estuary of the river and the strange bastions and embankments of the great mass on the land side have been sold: and the question of "the rate" forthwith becomes acute. It must be developed and improved. I foresee a row of new bungalows at one end of the place, that secret end where, a world away from everybody, I have watched the winter flocks of black coot and scoter sailing and dozing at the bar of the river, and parties of dancing water wagtails, fresh in from a long journey in spring or autumn, tripping on the miniature island beach. I foresee at least a golf links of eighteen holes at the other end, near the warren and the field of the ringed plovers; whilst it is quite possible to picture the Head itself crowned by a great hotel having the finest site on the south coast of England. For Hengistbury Head, indeed, read Hengistbury Hotel! One never much believed in the story of Hengist and Horsa in childhood, perhaps because it was told in such a wooden way. Now I know it a myth. The Finance Act and the growth of Bournemouth and Boscombe make this clear to me.

I have often written about the wild life of Hengistbury Head, but for purely selfish ends have not named the spot. Named places of the kind, when they lie too near railway stations or cities, have a way of not living long. But there is no longer any need to hide the name. Hengistbury will so soon be



SPEAKING.

harnessed to civilization that the wild life of it is no more a thing to be secret about. Its natural history period is nearly over; its history proper begins if history is the record of human things.

The headland itself has never been to me the chief attraction of the place. The scene there, I know, is magnificent on a clear day—Alum and the Needles, and the narrow strip of shingle that ends in Hurst Castle, where Charles lay on his last journey from Carisbrooke to Whitehall. It is a great sea, though such a small one measured in mere miles. Nor is it a sea very easily surpassed in variety of colour and beauty of coast scene by any other I know. The dove-grey downs at Purbeck at the moment when the sun is on their horizon, or again in the dusk of early morning, are wonderful; and so are the huge weather-stained chalk walls of Alum and Scratchel's Bays appearing gradually through a dissolving sea mist. But there are many other points all along that coast where the scene is quite as fine as the scene from the headland. There is no other spot from the Old Harry Rocks to Hayling so alluring to those who value wild life in a wild scene as the great "ham" immediately under the headland, and the flats and swamps there—the tract that belongs half to the land and half to the water. I have never been to this place, and I have been there many times, without seeing something worth remembering. The estuary of the Avon and the Stour may be nothing to-day to

the wildfowler. The great flocks of wild duck, teal, and widgeon that came there of old have gone, yet on winter days and spring days I have walked across the "ham" and then along the bank of the estuary, or climbed down from the headland into the withy wood beneath nestling right against the crumbling hill, and found a whole population of land and water birds.

I named the wood the "Merlin's Wood," because in winter I know the bird has sometimes been seen harrying a lark or even a snipe from the place. It is a strange and aloof place, lichened like the stunted oaks in a Cornish hollow. In dry weather in spring the dead leaves crackle under foot, but the wood is seen at its best when the whole ground betwixt headland and estuary is heavy with water. Water is more than half the mystery and the spell of a spot like this, all the green swards treacherous with it. Water, too, means wild life.

When Hengistbury has in due time its hotel and golf links and bungalows, and by-and-by when the wastes are all drained and the town that begins somewhat near the haven at Poole stretches to the end of the headland, and on the other side of the estuary, from Mudiford, say, to Lymington, I wonder where the willow warblers and chiff-chaffs will land each year in April. To see the earliest willow warblers and chiff-chaffs I have gone more than once to the wastes under Hengistbury or to one of the little bunneys or glens across the estuary, and I have not

gone there in vain. By mid-April I have found the withy scrub and the bramble alive with parties of willow warblers just in from Africa.

After one has seen and heard willow warblers and chiff-chaffs for a week or two each spring the pleasure of the thing may be a little blunted. A willow warbler in May does not count for a great deal perhaps. But the sight of the first willow warblers of the year is another matter. It is impossible to tell the charm about the earliest of these little exquisites. It is all incommunicable. One never noticed before on what fine lines a willow warbler is cast. Some word is needed finer than faery to fit him. The arch of his breast and head, the spindle of his leg, the trifle of his beak so searching true, and the brightness of his tiny eye and the quick flip of the neatest little wing that ever winnowed the air : this is the earliest willow warbler or the earliest chiff-chaff—it matters not at all which—of the year.

If willow warblers came through Evolution, ought we not to revise our view of Evolution as a hard and relentless method? The survival of the fittest includes, it seems, the survival of the most sensitive forms and delicate lives that the mind can imagine. Is it not an impossible paradox that unkindness made the willow warbler and the chiff-chaff what they are to-day—all sweetness and light?

I never saw the osprey by Hengistbury, nor the erne or sea eagle, which a local story associates with

the headland. The erne at Hengistbury may be a fable, like the eagle-tree inland where, I have been told, he roosts at nights whenever he visits the estuary; and the osprey or mullet hawk has long since gone with the mullets. But when the tide is out, and long bars of sand lie high and dry on the Mudiford side, the gulls in winter and early spring are wonderful to see from some point near the withy wood. I have watched the giant of them, the great black-backed gull, flying up and down the estuary with slow, solemn strokes of a huge wing and hoarse, abysmal cry. But it is the herring and black-headed gulls that gather on the spits in immense companies, and in some lights exactly resemble a storm of large, soft snowflakes as they flutter down on to the sand in a body. Sanderlings and other winter sandpipers and waders have their wild, lightning races up and down the estuary; and on the stonier bit of dry soil at the warren the ringed plover in March and April scatters in pairs, and exults in speed and in dazzling cut and twist through the air not less than the dunlin itself. The cormorant is always there through the winter, seated on one of those estuary stakes black as himself, and the black and grey crows feed and play at the edge of the water, or visit the spits of sand to sit among the snowy gulls. The redshank never leaves the water wastes at Hengistbury; it will, I think, be one of the latest of all to go when the new age begins there.

A few of us may regret the beginning of this new age, the working of a Finance Act on Hengistbury, and even think unreasonably that some Corporation might have bought the waste and withy wood and kept them for water-fowl and wader and the birds of passage in spring. But a Corporation does not deal in sanctuaries and sentiment. Its business is strictly material. A Corporation is a body, not a soul. We must console ourselves with thoughts of what Hengistbury has been to us. However prosaic its new age prove, it has had an old age full of a rare romance and wonderment. It was there, with its swamps and its "ham" and its braken-covered headland, an æon before England was; and, if this intensely individual and distinctive place had a memory, the building of the Church at Twynham and the work of the mysterious Builder who lengthened the beam would be events of yesterday.

Hengistbury broods on a time to human reckoning infinitely earlier than Twynham or Hengist and Horsa, the chronicle of which is written in shark's tooth and fossil fish in the cliffs near by of Barton and of Milford.

CHAPTER XV

THE BLACK REDSTART

IT is very well known to those who know English coast scenery that we can have azure skies and seas in November as we have them in June. We can even have them, and we indeed often have them, on mornings and early afternoons during spells of harsh and foul winter weather. An hour or so of sun, with a litttle wind to break up and scatter the dark cirro-stratus clouds, is often quite enough at the seashore at this time to make the sudden complete change from gloom to glory. I came full upon this azure one day in November after I had climbed the north side of brown Hengistbury Head and walked over its summit of burnt heather and dead brake fern—about the brownest thing, after hazel coppices in some mid-winter lights, I know in English landscape. I found the shade of azure and immense spread of it as true as on any day in summer at this place; only the shade was fainter than we have it then. Where the ruled sea-line met the sky, the azure paled away into that pearl-like whiteness which in English seascapes we often find about the horizon at this time of year,

however clear the air and bright the day. Moreover, the horizon itself was bitten out less hard and incisively than we often have it in summer—rather it appeared pencilled or softened down.

At the crumbling corner of the headland I came down the path on to a lower, grassy shelf, and stood there to look at the Needles. I never saw them from the mainland much distincter, and I never saw the rock of Scratchel's little bay show purer white. Seen from this point at the coast opposite, it appears to be scooped out from the downs in the form of a narrow, deep concave, quite clean and regular. The white rock in the immense belt of azure sky and sea made a noble pageant, and I felt I had never set too high the splendour of these cliffs. Looking from beacon to beacon across the water in this winter sheen, you find it has all the fineness you remembered of it—and how much more!

Whilst walking across the estuary waste below and through the strange withy wood and over the headland I found few signs of life—only a pair of silent hoodie crows and a rock pipit or two. But, standing here on a shelf just below the headland's summit, I got a glimpse almost at once of a chestnut tail of a small bird, and an instant later a black redstart settled a dozen yards away at the edge of the cliff. That is the only black redstart I have seen in England, but never was a small bird easier to identify. I knew what the bird was even before it settled,

though the last thing I was expecting to see was the black redstart.

The chestnut or bright bay of the tail as it flashed through the air in swift action can only mean "redstart" in such a place, and in November in England redstart must be black redstart. I should have been quite as sure of the bird even if I had not seen the black redstart abroad. I have seen it both in the Alps and in African hills, but the pleasure of at length finding it here in its winter quarters is peculiar and delicate. In one's first black redstart on an English cliff is a sense of discovery which the Swiss bird, nesting and singing in almost every Alpine village, could never give. Besides, the black redstart in England is a bird of curious questions—why should it come to us all in autumn and winter? and why, once having come and scattered in small numbers here and there along our coast, should it not stay to nest here like the other redstart, the regular English summer visitor and bird of passage?

This black redstart was a solitary, and I fancy by its tameness that it had lately crossed the water and was still feeling the strain of the journey. At first glimpse I was not struck by its beauty. I took it indeed for a dowdy; but after a very few minutes of watching I discovered it an exquisite. When it alit on the sand and turf a few yards away from me I saw that its plumage was not shabby, as I had thought, but neat and bright after, I imagine, its

first autumn month. It was a young male redstart and had not yet put on that black vest over the grey, which is the full livery of the cock-bird of two years old. But the grey of the head and neck and under parts was perfectly clean and even, and the chestnut of the flashing tail was fresh.

The whole form of the bird was as faery-fine as the form of our summer redstart, and so near was it to me once that I could note the dance and brightness of its eye.

I watched the bird for half an hour, and I learnt in that time things about a black redstart's habits of motion and food which entirely escaped me whilst watching the family at Murren and at Montana in the Alps. At Montana all I saw of the black redstarts answered absolutely to what I know of our summer redstart; but this bird in its pursuit of insects and in its wingship reminded me of a grey wagtail on a bit of close turf by the waterside. It constantly made sudden little rushes and leaps into the air to seize some midge or gnat that was out in the sun. Some of these excursions were on a tiny scale; the black redstart would dart straight up three inches or so into the air, seize a midge, and instantly alight on the sward again.

That was a singular, if simple, little feat which I do not know that I have seen in a wagtail, grey or pied, on the turf. But another feat was purely in the wagtail style: the black redstart would often dart

two or three yards into the air, seize an insect, make as if he were returning to the ground, but instead of returning straight he would dart off at a tangent and seize another insect, then, swift as thought, execute a third tangent, seize a third insect!

All this excursion might take two or three seconds, if as much, and whilst the black redstart was tumbling about in the air, whisking off from midge to midge, I could hear—he was so close—the smart snap of his little piercing beak just as I hear it when a wood-warbler or chiff chaff is taking gnats or midges in the air.

The charm, the swift grace of these limber feats by this minute frail bird on the huge cliff-side are for sight and feeling—they never could be for words. I fail, I know, to get the thing on to paper, but those who have watched wagtail action of the kind will know what I mean. On the wing, in the midst of its tangents, the black redstart does not look quite such a bundle of loose feathers, brilliant feathers, as the grey wagtail looks in this feat; he has not quite the aerial distinction of that fay in grey and gold; but, still, he is a thing of a lovely spright and beauty. There is no refining on the redstart!

That is the black redstart in the air and in motion. Then there is the black redstart at rest—if at any time from dawn to dusk he can be said truly to rest. His rest at least is all animation. When he rose from the shelf of turf and sand, and flashed off to the top

of the cliff and perched there, I saw his tiny form darkly silhouetted against the pale azure. There he was, by comparison, in repose for half a minute; but the volatile nature of a redstart is shown in that position almost as much as it is in aerial action, for on his perch he is constantly ducking or curtseying, like the redbreast on the garden bough or on the upturned soil.

Moreover, there is the tail action of the black redstart. This appears to be a thing quite peculiar to the family of these exquisite redstarts. I did not notice it even in the bird of the desert, Moussier's redstart, which is outside this little group. It has been described in the common redstart as a shake of the tail, but that is only rudely expressive of the thing. In the black redstart I should rather describe it as the most sensitive shiver, the tail feathers being quickly, ever so slightly, agitated from side to side rather than up and down like those of the wagtail. It is a much fainter movement and a smaller one and harder to follow than the wagtail's, and it does not look at all like a balancing one.

The act is so slight that one cannot see it in anything like a sexual display. The tail of a black redstart may be his chief adornment, but this shivering of it can scarcely help in the display of the bright bay or chestnut colour. It only adds to the black redstart's beauty as a whole by the added touch of vivacity and refined motion which it gives.

A reader of mine wrote one day to upbraid me for often seeking the meaning and use of beauty in various forces of wild life. Why not accept it all thankfully, she asked, instead of trying to probe into the evolution and object of it? Well, I think one may let it rest at that, so far as the black redstart on the cliff goes. The origin of the thing, the use of it—if any—to the black redstart, are perhaps too obscure to profit us ever as a problem—though the baffling problem of this black redstart's migration is another matter.

But at least there is nothing obscure, no uncertainty or remoteness of profit, in the sight of the bird on the cliff. If a thing of beauty in Nature is ever a profit to us, we are secure enough of gain in watching the black redstart in its natural scene—a bird out of that scene is nothing to see or to hear. Such sights have a rare lasting quality. Many people come to feel the cutting truth of the least sentimental poet—

> "Years following years steal something every day;
> At last they steal us from ourselves away."

But some of the most enduring things in one's experience of what is fine in Nature or in Art are these excellent, small forms of life in their great settings of hill and sky and water.

CHAPTER XVI

SHAKESPEARE'S MIDWINTER

NO one in English literature from the start of it to this time ever expressed midwinter in England so well as Shakespeare did in two or three of the songs in his plays, just hitting off in a few perfectly simple touches the main features of it. The winter of Shakespeare is hard-bitten winter, of course, snow and frost and a shrewd wind; for the other kind of winter, the green and spongy and morbid season, is not for a poet, indeed is not for literary form at all. It is the spurious season, too familiar perhaps in our own time, which, to judge by their writings and records, did not enervate England in the great day of the Elizabethans.

Shakespeare's winter tale is told in the little songs in "Love's Labour's Lost" and in "As You Like It." The fresh cheer and jollity and robustness of it, and the bite and roughness of it, are expressed with all the insolent ease of supreme genius. They do not look or read as if they had been in the least degree wrought or laboured over, and in all likelihood they were not, for Shakespeare did not live long enough and the bulk of his work was too large surely to allow

of his giving much time and thought to a few small odds and ends in the plays. They are almost childish in their simplicity, as genius usually is. Some of the most exquisite Nature touches are spoken by fools—though Shakespeare's fools are not what we call fools to-day. Icicles hanging by the wall, and Dick the shepherd blowing his nails, and Tom bringing logs into the hall for the fire, and milk coming home frozen in the pail, and foul roads and birds sitting brooding in the snow, and Marian's nose looking red and raw—these things really seem more fit for a child's account of winter than an immortal song of the master.

Equally childlike and simple, when one comes to examine it, is the magic bit that follows about the tawny owl, that bird of midwinter nights:

> "Then nightly sings the staring owl,
> To-who;
> To-whit, to-who, a merry note;
> While greasy Joan doth keel the pot."

Yet magic, sheer magic, it is; and, incidentally, one remarks to oneself on reading for the hundredth time, that nobody has ever succeeded in improving on, or even in equalling, Shakespeare's version of what the brown owl says.

That is Shakespeare's view of the merry and invigorating side of midwinter, all the cheer and the humour of it. The bite of it, its keen tooth and rude

blast come out in the marvellous, small lyric on holly and the wind in "As You Like It," with its blend of joy and bitterness alternating from line to line. Shakespeare makes one of his characters say :

> "In Nature's infinite book of secrecy
> A little I can read."

There is no sign that he had himself peered at all minutely or deep into that book of secrecy. There is not a passage in the songs or the plays or the sonnets that suggests for a moment that he was a searching scholar in the study of Nature apart from man. For instance, the knowledge of minutiæ in Shakespeare could not compare with the curious minutiæ in some of our modern masters.

The point about him is the glorious way in which he grasped the few great essential things whenever he turned to natural sights and sounds.

All through English literature poets and prose writers have been striving to capture and write down evening in England and its monochrome, the tint and the tone of it. Collins and Shelley and Milton and Gray may have felt they at least had approached success. But Shakespeare reached it. His "light thickens, and the crow makes wing to the rooky wood" *is* evening in our landscape ; whilst, if any emphasis were needed to a thing that is all emphasis, there is another line "The shard-borne beetle, with his drowsy hums"—the "wild airel" of a poem

by Hogg—and that, too, is evening in our landscape.

Shakespeare laid hold of and secured the essential and the childishly simple in just the same way when he turned to the small birds. There is a pure and lovely line in Spenser's "Faery Queen"—"To take the air and hear the thrush's song," a cure for one who had lain ill for a time. But there are lovelier ones in Shakespeare's songs of the singing birds. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream" he hit them off as no one has ever done :

> "The ouzel-cock, so black of hue,
> With orange-tawny bill,
> The throstle with his note so true,
> The wren with little quill."

Others have tried to paint the blackbird, and one has given him a "gold dagger of a bill," but there is no list of the birds to equal Shakespeare's little child's list. Any day in midwinter one may go out and see at once these three, and recognize the genius of Shakespeare's description, a description of the perfectly obvious in Nature.

Scores of little Nature touches, not so essential, perhaps, as these, but exquisite often and happy, probably flash on the memory of anyone who knows the plays well. What a delicate and lovely conceit that is about the "fairies' coachmaker" in "Romeo

and Juliet" and the empty hazel nut! I imagine the harness was made from the gossamer of the woods. I believe in a book I have somewhere there is actually a picture of Queen Mab driving with reins spun by a spider. His metaphors and similes founded on Nature prove just the same grip of the essential and simple. It is not possible, it seems, to hackney them. How, by the most excessive repetition, could the worm in the bud be hackneyed?

> "She never told her love;
> But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
> Feed on her damask cheek.

Some people may find the spring descriptions the best things in Shakespeare's Nature. I incline to think his winter is the finest, but the vivid freshness of the spring in Shakespeare is great indeed. It acts on one as a thing physically felt in the daffodil song in "A Winter's Tale," with its sweet of the year and "the white sheet bleaching on the hedge." Though he had read but a little in the secret book of Nature outside human life, Shakespeare was clearly an intimate of Nature. His lore was wholly his own, personal and direct and pure from the source.

Whatever else is known or denied about Shakespeare, we can know for sure that the lyrics and songs and the lines scattered through his work came

straight from his own experience. Their immense vigour and lasting freshness prove it. In these descriptions he does not merely hold up the glass of Nature. The glass is a device of literature. But the effect of Shakespeare's genius in the songs is this—he is constantly able to create for us, when we are absent from it, the real thing.

PHASE FOUR

ENGLISH SEA

CHAPTER I

THE PAGEANT OF PORTSMOUTH

THE truest test of scenery may be long, old intimacy with it. True, this is not always a trustworthy test in the case of a man's native place where he spent his childhood and early years, on which he may look back as years of paradise. The native scene, even to the discriminating eye of taste, may appear very good simply through the magic of association, the illusions of memory. The garden along whose gravel paths once again Rogers walked in thought may not have been so distinguished among gardens as he imagined, and as the poem makes us picture it. Without old friendship with them, the quiet small landscapes of the country about Olney would never have drawn from Cowper such lines of praise as he wrote in pain when he was leaving them for ever. Some people, with deep attachment to their native scenery, have fully recognized this part association plays, and half feared to return lest they should find so much of it an illusion—the rivers shrunk sadly, little more than brooks; the great trees stunted—there never were trees equal to those that grow about

the long-lost home—the hills and valleys not out of the common run.

"We'll turn aside from Yarrow."

Many people have had a chilling experience in this. Some feeling of the kind touched Hood perhaps when he thought of the house where he was born and of the fir-trees around it whose tops once seemed almost to touch the sky—it might be a mistake to go there and find himself much farther from Heaven than when he was a boy.

Old intimacy with a native scene, then, may deceive or half-deceive people as to its intrinsic merit of beauty. But when the scene we come to know well is not the half-enchanted one of early, wholly happy years, where it has stabbing thoughts—some oppression even of the dull aching weight of death still kept for us there—as well as store of good memories, the test is much more to be trusted.

It is truest and surest where we become slowly conscious of the beauty of the scene, steeped in it little by little, each visit we pay it, even each day we see it, new glories unfolding themselves; always something exquisite, subtle, surprising being revealed, the exact likeness of which we cannot remember seeing and wondering at before.

This is how I grew to know the sea and landscapes between Hayling and Poole Harbour. They are not native scenes, though I have known some parts of the

district most of my life; and only by degrees has a full awakening to their beauty come to me. To-day I can see nothing tame or cramped about these scenes, nor any other scenes quite to match them in blend and national feeling, the pageant and expression of England an empire.

This appreciation, then, has been a somewhat slow growth. The glory of the Solent did not flash upon me all at once; for a long while breezier open seas on the East Coast or rockier, wilder seas of Devonshire and the West of Ireland appealed more directly to me. The Solent seemed very pretty and gentle, full of halcyon calm, where these other seas had bracing force, wild spray and rough wave, the strong salt of sea life all about them. This is a view common to many who have seen and cruised about the Solent from time to time, and found it, in the summer, often unruffled as the millpool of one of the chalk streams that make Southampton Water; but it is a view which most people can modify or put aside wholly when they come to study the scene closely and often, in all its moods and lights, and to think of its wonderful national story, and of the fleet that rides it, guardian of an "awful and magnificent cause."

For English empire in almost perfect microcosm I know of nothing which quite equals that lovely ribbon of water between mainland and island, with a narrow strip of country on either side, from the flat coast of Hayling to the crumbling cliffs of South-

bourne, and from Needles and white cliffs of Alum Bay to Foreland and to Culver. Into this little space are compressed the supreme things of empire: Might, the battle-ship its symbol; World-Commerce; History in some of its most moving, most significant passages; and that setting of Beauty, in natural scene, land and sea scape without which a complete nation is unthinkable.

As to scenery, natural beauty and ever-changing look of water, cloud, light and land, the worth of these things on the life and character of people can hardly be over-valued—there is no danger of our over-valuing them to-day. It is sentiment in a way no doubt, but the appreciation of beautiful scenery is also of great practical service; indeed, sentiment that is not at the root a practical thing, helping to make men complete and better, is worthless rubbish; it is sentimentalism—a wretched affectation. I do not see how anybody can deny that, by rightly valuing and being moved by it, men and women tend to be happier and of a higher mind; it must follow that these things are of solid, practical use by making better citizens. It would be wrong-headed utilitarianism to question the practical good we get by dwelling on and valuing to the full beautiful English scenery.

Hayling, which I call the islet, lies to the extreme east of the British Sea, a slip of a place, not much more than four miles across at its broadest, which is

by the sea, and scarcely over five miles in length. When the tide is fully up over the mud-flats of Chichester Harbour on the east and Langston on the west, only a mile of dry land divides water from water at the middle of the islet, its wasp waist. Chichester Harbour lies outside our chart, but Langston is not an unimportant point upon it. To-day Langston carries no ship of war; not even a torpedo-boat can be seen there, only small fishing-smacks and the like. It would need vast toil to clear and deepen the harbour for ships, even for yachts and the smallest vessels of the Navy; a very long, to some almost an unimaginable, work to dredge and carry away to sea the millions of years of sand and mud which have silted and settled here. Many people say it can never be done. But imagine England continuously growing as a ship empire, and cast the mind not more than a century ahead; may not Portsmouth by then be dredged to its utmost carrying capacity for ships? Or suppose Langston Harbour to-day actually were able to carry ships—who could doubt that it would be covered with them at times? Remembering the rise of modern Portsmouth and Southampton, and the way in which huge works of land and water have been done in a single generation or a short lifetime, it seems rash to say that Langston must always be for sea-bird and fisher-boat. Is it not just a question of whether England's power and commerce is to grow within the next hundred years at

all as it has in the last? Take the view it is; then you think quite easily of Langston and Portsmouth as twin harbours.

It is natural to play with such thoughts about the future of Langston and its islet when one is walking from Eastney and crossing the narrow channel by the ferry-boat; but not less it is very good to be able in spring, or in the heat of midsummer, when the oak copses and spinneys are June-perfect, to leave the town and spend a long day on the islet. The refreshment of it is realized all the more that, from Portsmouth or Gosport, to reach the ferry one has passed through street after street where life seems as packed, and beauty in building or garden as far to seek, as in many of the environs of far larger English cities—in London itself: miles of houses, outwardly unexpressive of home, nothing about their faces to touch or cheer the imagination. Wherever we are great and rich in commerce, there is this dark side of things, and no overlooking it. The oppression of life overcrowded, denied its share of earth, sky, and water, is not quite shaken off till we are in the ferry-boat. We left the last row of houses—every house so aggressively like its neighbour—a mile or two back, but they are too near to be shaken off the mind till we are on the water or have landed on the other side. The islet has a little railway across the bridge, but the simple way to reach it is from Portsmouth by the

ferry-boat. The moment we land we are free of all oppression of town life, so effectual is that narrow bar of deep water. On such an islet life strikes us as quite different from life on the mainland—the stress and anxiousness of it have gone.

CHAPTER II

ISLET AND ISLE

DURING winter the islet may be sombre, wind-swept, and desolate compared with other places along this coast, certainly with the island whose western point we see nearly opposite when we look out to sea. Being so windy and exposed along the whole of its little low coast, it is slow to take on the full spring look. In May the marram grass, that binds and keeps together the poor soil close to the sea edge, is in most places still winter-white or sand-brown. A little inland, however, on the common that lies between sea and harbour, the gorse is in a great glow early in May, and the meagre turf in some seasons has thick little patches of a flower of deep rare blue, Dillenius's dog violet. The study stonechat, a bird spread along the whole of the coastline of the British sea and living there throughout the year, flits and softly warbles in this wonderful glory of gorse; and once or twice I have seen its nest deep down among the thorns, five faint-blue freckled eggshells, delicate treasures, just showing in their cup set in the gold. Here is one of Nature's tiny, dainty pictures, something that turns us, for the first few moments of surprise,

all eye and finger-tip. The islet in May and June has many secret treasures of the same kind as the stone-chat's nest. Wandering among the saltings, when the harbour tides have been low, I have found the thrush's nest—blue set in gold here too—at the very edge of the mud-flats. By these flats we may lie for hours where there is a bit of dry ground or shingle, and have all the harbour and the islet within sight to ourselves. There are often quiet places close to crowded, sounding ones, but I know few to match in its gift of loneliness parts of the sea beach or the harbour's edge of this place. Tide in, tide out, this untenanted harbour, hospitable in its far recesses only to the great black-backed gull, in size the English albatross, and green cormorants of the island opposite, is wonderful to the eye always, and in many lights steeped in mystery. Mud in little, churned by human works, is the ugliest, least inspiring thing in matter we know; that is mud polluted. It is very different with these great flats, miles of gleam and glitter over which the salt tide runs and creeps. After dark there is an awe and an aloofness about them, the thought of which will strike on the imagination of all people who have feeling for the wild scenes in Nature; then it is as though some spirit that brooded over them were awake and moving, but even in the familiar daytime and the cheerful sunlight they are never quite without their touch of mystery.

Nothing out of keeping with Langston is ever to

be seen on the water or about the spits of sand and the eyots of mud and rushes: the rough, tarred boats of some fisher, who earns a bare living from the scanty harvests of the sea hereabouts, silvery bass or flat fish; distant roving figures searching at low tide for still smaller prizes; the wild mew of the gulls at the harbour-bar often so thick and restless in the air just above the water that their wings in the sunlight are a shower of dazzling white—these are the only signs of life about the waters here, each one in perfect accord with the scene.

This islet, with its broad belt of shingle, stretching—for the south of England—far back from the sea, and with its unreclaimed harbour and to the south and south-east outlook on open sea, always strikes me as the rudest and wildest spot on this little chart of waters. True, if we glance at it on the map of England, it does not give the impression of a place of this quality. It looks on the map almost as if set in a small sheltered bay, Selsey on one side, Wight on the other. But, lying on one of the shelving beaches of Hayling when the wind is coming in hard from the sea—and it will blow hard even in the late spring and summer for weeks together here—we get a truer idea of its character. A mile or two inland, where the islet grows green and there are bluebell woods with shelter and warmth for summer birds, the scenery is idyllic rather than rough and seaworthy, but down on the shingle we have something of the tonic and robust

feeling of the English coast of tradition. For the lotus isles and waters we must turn westward to Spithead and Solent scenes.

Everybody knows of the fame of the Isle of Wight as a winter place, one of the gardens of England where delicate flowers and shrubs will live and flourish in the open the year through—myrtles, lemon-plant, and other more fragile things that inland we can in winter only keep under glass; but, even so, the time to see the Island and its waters at their best is the summer. It is then, say from June till October, that the colouring of the coasts and sea is so rich and rare, endless in variety and swift change, and in the undertones and gradations, the finest pencilled lines, and the most filmy effects that can be made by light, land, air, and water.

The straight, clean lines of this scene often appeal to me. It is an error which rules the straight line out of Nature—that is, out of our vision of Nature. The straight, hard line of artifice is often an offence to the eye, but the straight lines, often unflinchingly hard and clean, clipped or bitten out on the water or the horizon, sometimes on the land, which Nature presents to the eye, part of her perspective of distance, are very different. There is often the hard, clean line of the sea from the Freshwater cliffs to the Dorsetshire coast, or rather to a point opposite that coast. Looked at from the mainland, somewhere midway between the east and west points, at Hengistbury

Head or the Southbourne cliffs, this horizon of sea forms a slight curve scarcely removed from a dead straight line. If it appeared to the eye actually a straight line, absolute and severe, I doubt whether it would be less beautiful. If not the sea line for any length, at least the land line often is ruled straight and severe, and the effect is fine.

Standing on the Island, I have wondered at the straight and ruled low coast opposite. Look at Hayling from the shore about Sea View or nearer Ryde. In some lights the line is ruled not only absolutely straight to the eye, but clean as of something cut with the sharpest instrument. No eye surely could ever be displeased with this straightness and sharp definition. We may get the same effect, the same in straightness if not quite in sharpness, looking across a marsh or great water meadow at a long line of reeds by the river a mile or two distant. We know that the river is not really straight; on the contrary, that its course is sinuous, and the belt of reeds sinuous with it. But distance rules both of them straight, and in winter, especially when the dead reed-stems are blanched and hoary, they stand up as a regular, inflexible line. But there is nothing stiff or tiring to the eye in this array. The effect of sharply cut or hard lines of water and land in Solent scenes is not, of course, invariable. Often when the lines are straight to the eye they are softened by the atmosphere and light so that quite another effect is produced: then

they take the form of the vague rim or edge of matter that seems etherealized. You will see the same thing at Naples, Capri, Sorrento.

From this coast about Sea View, a coast full of idyllic land as well as seascape, we often find the water arranged in lines or bands of colour, so characteristic of the Solent. These colours are not so fixed and surprising in brilliance as those of many waters famed for colour, such as the Sogne and the Hardanger Fjords of Norway. They are not Sicilian blues and sea-greens. It is easy to imagine brighter, more striking colour than is seen here, but greater variety, subtler tone or tinting, never. From the coast of the Island or the downs behind it, looking northwards and east and west, you can see on bright and overcast days alike bands of distinct colour laid one beyond the other in the precise orderly way that Nature often chooses for seascape. Towards sunset the bands sometimes disappear, and instead nearly the whole water becomes a sheet of deep indigo. Beyond and above this grand layer of colour you see a low, long line of purple hill from Cosham and beyond to the New Forest; above and beyond this purple is a band of pale grey—the filmy hills of the far horizon; finally over all the pure faint blue of the sky.

That is an afternoon scene on the Solent. An hour or two later, and the sunset begins. The whole sky to the west and north-west has a wonderful lustrous

look. It is not colour so much as glow then, a certain indescribable luminous appearance : in the exaltation of such sunsets we want no brilliant effects of colour —colour might in these magic minutes be thought of as almost a material, unrefined thing compared with this glow and afterglow. This is a full summer sunset, about mid-June or July, and when the sky is cloudless has not even a wisp of cirrus in the ice-heights of the air. Earlier in the year, in stormy spring weather especially, one can enjoy cloud and sundown scenes from the water or the land, mainland or island coast, that prove how absolutely faithful was the art of Turner. When loose storm clouds, the gauzy shrouds and veils of the cirro-stratus—cloud of a thousand different forms—are floating in the west, the sun, still an hour above the horizon, will turn them over the water to a fine dust of gold. It is in such a gold dust that I have seen the whirl of puffins on the North Cornish coast.

CHAPTER III

ILLUSIONS OF THE ENGLISH SEA

IN May I have seen the sea off Hengistbury and Poole and Southbourne striped and ribboned with all imaginable shades of purple and blue, each stripe or ribbon lying parallel with the land. The light streak of the sand-dunes with the palest green of the marram grasses—sand and marram grass going always so well together—completes this colour scene.

The beach of the Dorsetshire coast beyond Poole Harbour is drawn out with the utmost fineness and delicacy, and here, as at Hayling, the land, at a distance of a few miles, looks as if cut into and raised a little above the level of the sea, an illusion constant but always remarkable. May is a great month for this western part of the Solent, for the steep sides of the chines, or bunneys, are gold with hot-scented gorse then, as later some of them will be coral with heather. Standing a few hundred yards up one of these old water-courses, and looking down to the sea and up to the sky—what a sight of gold and blue for us! The earth has many painful riddles; here is a riddle that baffles but never distresses the mind—why is it so marvellously beautiful to look at? That there is

some vast, hidden aim and end in this beauty of the world is a thought that often takes hold of us in such summer scenes as these ; but we have no science or theory of life that offers the smallest clue.

At dawn in May, the sea dead still and the line of undulating downs across the bay at Poole may seem to be one substance ; the distinction between water and land at this hour disappears. Waking then, and looking through the window westward, I have taken the downs to be part of the sea ; after all, they are sea-coloured often enough, now blue, now deep purple, and in form like a great swell of the sea suddenly struck still.

In autumn the sea and landscapes of the Isle of Wight towards evening and in very still weather grow etherial, all the familiar passing from them. The hills of the Island, seen from the water, grow utterly unsubstantial then. They turn dove-coloured, and so soft and light is their appearance that they might, to a stranger to the place, pass for clouds on the horizon. The sea, with the mild sun on it, is emerald, and the band of colour that adjoins it to the north, given by the wooded shores of Hamble and Southampton Water, is a splendid purple. At other times, on an autumn evening like this, but with some imperceptible difference in the atmosphere, the faint outlines of hills far beyond Portsmouth and its land forts have the peculiar appearance of being partly covered with a thin coating of stained snow. Every

shade of blue and green touches these waters between mainland and island in early autumn as in summer, often changing with a changing sky from minute to minute.

These transformation scenes of grey May mornings and of autumn, turning matter to mist, or mist to matter, are not, of course, peculiar to this part of England. We notice them inland in vague lights, as well as about the coast. Who has not seen the great restful cumulus clouds at the close of day banked on the horizon like a range of distant hills? And as there are mock hills made of mist, so in a thicker atmosphere there are mock clouds made of matter: seen from my window, on a veiled October morning after a night of frost, the row of beech-trees across the meadow have appeared a bank of clouds on the skyline gathering for a heavy storm. But here on the coast such effects are more frequent and surprising in mimicry. Of many such scenes I recall an autumn one of haunted beauty close to Ryde—of the kind that takes complete hold of us and leaves a lasting impression on the mind. As we came near the Island the west sky and sea were steeped in fire and copper. To the south-west, in strong contrast with all this colour, the dark, almost black, line of trees on the Island stood out; and over them was a blotched outline in grey of a giant forest made of cloud. Some trees in that wood of phantasy—phantasy it little seemed in those moments of glory and wonder—

were massive limes in shape ; and there were contorted trees of no particular species, but generally resembling the wind-tossed and twisted trees of wild coasts ; finally, there were firs of delicate, feathery leafage.

To the east and south-east the scene was wholly different. Here the water was highly polished and darkly calm, with a white gleam here and there of seagulls. The gauzy veil of autumn mist was mixing with the smoke of a passing steamer. The town, the woods about it, the bare hills beyond—each was presented in the softest, the least material form ; here were no clean-cut outlines, no heavily blotched masses of tree foliage, no splendour of sunset. Softness and the deepest calm prevailed ; the kind of calm that is felt as if it were a presence, a power to fill and rule us, masterful and benign, smoothing out all the roughness or uneasiness of the mind and subliming pleasure.

I suppose that very many strenuous natures are affected at times by these transcendental calms that haunt the woods in summer, and the downs and mountains, but especially the creeks and harbours of the sea when the lights of day and night are mixing. The effect on the mind is of some gracious white sheet drawn down, shutting us off from the turmoil of things. It reminds me of the beehive, eager, unresting, perhaps up in rebellion, when the bee-master comes and draws his cloth gently over the

seething combs, and forthwith the whole uneasy community is charmed to peace.

Not all the illusions of this sea are kept for the hush of sundown and the shade of coming night. The sea blooms of the Solent, films and hazes, at all seasons glorify and mystify every ship they touch, clumsy coal barge, harbour dredger, graceful racing yacht. They can turn every ship to a phantom ship. I saw the *Discovery* coming into Portsmouth through a thin veil of grey or purple mist—hard to say for sure whether more grey or purple, the transitions from shade to shade and colour to colour being subtle, and the vocabulary for such gradations of light not existing. The *Discovery* came out of a region of unreality, taking little by little the form of matter and the familiar features of a ship. Even when the air to the horizon seems clear and the sun is shining brightly, the magic of sea and light is never gone for long. The sea has no monotony of the kind. Besides phantom ships turning to real, we may often see real ships turning to phantom. In clear fine weather this is so with any ship or boat that carries a sail. The last thing we shall be tired by here is plain objects presented in a plain way.

It must have been a supreme ship spectacle to watch the great wooden walls under anything like a press of sail leaving Portsmouth! Fancy the *Victory* passing through the Solent on the way to Trafalgar —her plumage of canvas, some sails bending, others

flapping, and the dazzle of the light and the shadow on them, and the thought of what was the *Victory's* mission. Even unemotional men may have lain on the hills or by the shore to watch those ships from the moment they left the harbour till the tops of their gallant masts went under the sea line. We have nothing quite equal to this now, but even those butterflies of the Solent, the racing yachts, running before the breeze or tacking, manœuvring, straining, are fine to see. A ship sail is one of the most beautiful things which man ever invented. Are there half a dozen other inventions in the whole output of art and civilization to equal in this a sail spread before the wind? The wheel may surpass it in ingenuity; equal it in service to man; the ploughshare may; but neither touches the sail in beauty. We have done little to increase the beauty of the natural world, but the sail does really seem to add to the sea, as the Early English church spire adds to landscape made of elms and little hills and valleys and cressy streams.

The man who first made the sail and spread it to take the wind rivalled Nature. It seems as if the sail in its perfect beauty, simplicity, and necessity should have been made by Nature.

The loss of the old wooden walls, of the galleons, and galleasses before them, can never be made good; but it is something that in these pleasure argosies we are uniting grace and strength and fleetness in a way our seaworthy forefathers never dreamed of. The

racing yachts, as we watch them to-day in the British Sea, have grown in these qualities, till they do appear to have touched perfection. Watch them from the shore of the Island, at Ryde or Sea View: they file past in a straight line—as straight as the low coast opposite, or as those stripes of Prussian blue, indigo, ultramarine, that in bright summer days lie across the green and purple waters, always parallel with the land, an effect often produced by the floating sea-weed masses. Now their sails are grey, now white as the gulls showered about the spit of sand a mile out at sea. The racing craft put the finishing-touch to this scene.

On the folded downs of the Isle of Wight, where there are high-lying cornfields, wheat-gold at the beginning of August, we may see much beauty and variety of tone and colour if there are a few clouds moving. Sun and shadow races over the corn will go on for hours of a fine day. The lightest breeze sweeping across these wheatfields, swinging gently the heavy ears, brings with it swift changes of light. But the earth even in these sensitive places is not so responsive to the blue sky and cloud as the water is. Where the corn and heavy hayfields reproduce the changes in shade of the sky, the sea on some days will sympathize with the sky in the least change of colour and tint; though it does not merely copy or repeat the colours there; in receiving, it subjects them to certain changes and mixing processes, so

that it can improve on the glory of the vast ceiling. This seems to be the exclusive property of the sea. Looking into a quiet lake among the birch and pine woods of the mainland, or into the crystal-clear chalk streams that flow into the Solent, I find only a faithful copy of the sky and clouds and the trees hanging over the water. The sea, alone among these waters, receiving and absorbing, can in the act transcolour.

CHAPTER IV

THE LOVELINESS OF ENGLAND

WATCH the racing yachts from the water itself at Cowes or at Ryde. From the sea near Ryde the sight is perhaps more imposing, because the boats file away almost to that clean-cut line that moves us so deeply, no matter how often or in what part of the earth or water we look at it, the end of the visible world. Over there lies the lightship, and round it the yachts swing one by one, for their line has grown long and straggling, and the gaps are wide. I have spoken of the swift racers as butterflies, and the image seems to fit them well enough in the idea of lightness and unsubstantiality as well as of spright which it carries. They look fairy-like at a little distance, but there is nothing on the sea more deceptive than these boats in seeming bulk. The largest of them looks as if it might well be contained in one of the smaller steam packets which ply between mainland and island in a Stokes Bay boat. But really a Stokes Bay boat is scarcely half the tonnage of a racing yacht of the *Ingomar* class. One forgets the canvas the yacht has to carry. This canvas

is subject to transformation scenery strange and wonderful as that of the hills and coasts.

There was an August race which we watched from the sea near Ryde. The *Ingomar* led the way from the starting-point by Ryde to the Warner Light-ship. Extent and weight of canvas were unmistakable when we were within a hundred yards of the yachts. Again, half a mile from the starting-point, when the yachts were drawn close together and getting into line against the signal, the mass of sail was most striking. But a few minutes later, when instead of this stately group we saw a lengthening line streaming eastward at Spithead, these glorious sails were by play of light reduced to shreds and tatters. This was when we saw the boats clipped out on the sky. As each boat reached the point where this was first noticed in regard to the leader, exactly the same effect was produced, till presently we were looking at a fleet of toy boats not one of which showed a whole sail.

* * * * *

These are random sketches, slight and faulty, of sea and seascape which, in its marvellous and delicate and quick-changing beauty, has a thrall over all people who know the place and care for such scenes and for the drama of Nature. I never tried to put into words my thoughts and impressions of any scene of natural loveliness in England — wood, waste, or water — without knowing after the attempt that I had failed

more or less entirely. The best part of our appreciation has no language. He that but half sees actually sees and enjoys more than the man with twice his power to see and appreciate, furnished, too, with a gift of words, can set on paper. This is easily illustrated. Two passages of supreme descriptive merit of different quality occur to me. Ruskin in "The Crown of Wild Olive" described the springs of the Wandle before their pollution, in a passage which seems as near inspiration as anything in our empire of print, lifted up like Shelley's lyrics. The other is those three words in "Hyperion"—"Eve's one star." In the one passion, in the other art, can go no farther. These are master touches in the cunning of words. Yet thousands of ordinary people have seen and enjoyed more of the wellhead of a pure stream, or of Venus in the afterglow at sundown, than is brought out in Ruskin's passage, in Keats's crystal of word perfection. If, then, the masters fail to tell what they have seen and felt, why should we without any special art of words make the attempt? At first thought it seems presumption and a useless thing. But I believe that would be bad judgment of effort that is instinctive and earnest. Earnestness is paramount; one cannot lay too much stress on it; enthusiasm for natural and national scenery which does not come straight and clean from the wells of feeling is odious; a cult of nature or of patriotism, the least suspicion of it, would be too repulsive. Given the en-

thusiasm, and the instinct to tell, it is a kind of right in those who have had intense pleasure from such scenes to help impart a little of the thing to others. If we send a few people to find the treasure, we discharge some of our debt. Debt and duty are terms that properly apply to this, especially where the scenes are our own country's. The delusion that to see and enjoy fine scenery we must go abroad may not be so common as it was; still, it cheats many people, and we should do what is in our power to dispel it.

English sea, sky, and hills soon exhausted of their variety and beauty or wanting in either! One summer day spent on these waters, or along their coast, proves the error. Climb Hengistbury Head and look out to sea from the braken of its summit, or inland across the estuary to old Twynham and the Forest—this assures a man he need not go beyond England for beauty and marvellous colour in unnamed, indescribable tint and gradation. Barton Cliffs to the west of Hengistbury or Culver on the Island will serve as well, or the wooded reaches of the Beaulieu River when the tide is in and at the full. I scarcely know a spot along this coast or on this sea that will not serve the purpose—Netley, Hamble, Hayling, Bembridge, Yarmouth, Freshwater.

No one could exhaust the beauties of England, no eye could be educated above them. As this applies to England as a whole, so it applies to single counties

and districts. The problems of origin and destiny, of life, mind, and matter, press closer on the thoughts of each succeeding generation; but the riddle of beauty, its source and end, is to us at times as deep and wonderful as any. Beauty exercises such a sway over us, and is so widely spread upon earth and sky and water, that we must be in a dark mood to question some highness in its origin and end.

Never is this riddle of beauty more insistent for me than when I think or look at these few miles of calm English sea.

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